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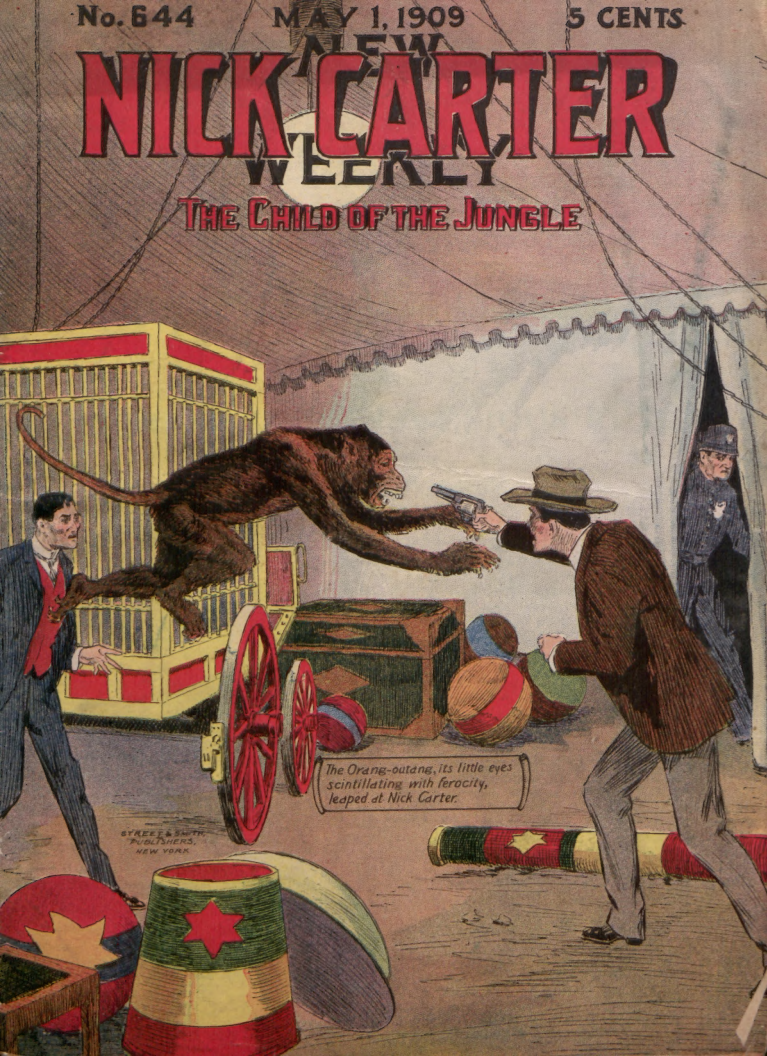
NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

THE CHILD OF THE JUNGLE



NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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The Child of the Jungle

OR,

NICK CARTER'S INGENIOUS RUSE.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE MYSTERIOUS NUMBER.

Boston's chief of police was alone in his private office. He seemed to be expecting some one for his eyes were frequently directed to the door. At last it opened and Nick Carter, carrying a suit case in his hand, entered. The chief's face glowed with pleasure as he arose and extended his hand.

"I'm awfully glad you have come, Nick," he said. "I am up a stump and need the help of the best detective in America. When I wired you I named the man."

Nick Carter smiled. "Compliments aside," he returned, "I am willing to give you a week of my time. Seven days is the limit, though, for eight days hence I must start for Montreal."

"That's all right, Nick. If you don't get to the bottom of the affair before the end of a week, I'll miss my guess. But it's a big thing, all the same, and it embraces a mystery that seems incapable of solution."

"Give me the facts, chief."

After looking over some papers on his desk the chief began:

"The affair takes in a murder and a mysterious disappearance. Three nights ago a book and stationery dealer, Thomas Perron by name, was murdered in his office at the rear of his store. His skull was smashed by an iron bar and a knife pierced his heart. The work of either weapon would have caused death. Robbery could not have been the motive of the fiendish crime, for no attempt was made to rob the safe and only a cheap, silver watch was taken from the body."

"It was an act of revenge for some real or fancied wrong, I should say," remarked the great detective.

"There is no doubt on that score," responded the chief. "And the murderer must have been a savage brute and of tremendous strength. Admitting that, and also taking into consideration the character and reputation of Chetwood Holley, it does not seem possible that he could have been the slayer."

"So there is a suspect."

"Yes, but he has not been arrested. He has disappeared and in the most mysterious manner. I have met with many strange cases in my experience, but this Holley case beats them all. Here is the story: Chetwood Holley is a young man of steady habits and excellent reputation. He is, or was, a broker's clerk and he aspired to the hand of Perron's only daughter, a girl of many accomplishments and surpassing beauty. The old man frowned on Holley's suit and no later than last week, drove the young man from the house with curses, calling him a beggar, a fortune seeker and all kinds of a scoundrel. Holley has no fortune, while Perron was a rich man. His daughter will come into his money for he had no other children, and was a widower. When Holley was ejected from the house he was heard to say that Perron ought to be killed

and that he had half a mind to do the killing then and there.

"A few nights afterward, just before the time of closing, the young man went to the store. He was seen to enter and he was seen to depart. He was inside about five minutes, long enough to commit a murder. The man who saw him on both occasions is a saloon keeper next door. Holley was pale and agitated when he came out of the store and after one startled glance at Dolan, the saloon keeper, he hurried away.

"Shortly after this Dolan went into the book store. He knew of the unfriendly feeling between Perron and Holley for Perron had told him what had occurred at the house. Dolan is an old friend of Perron and for years has been the recipient of the book dealer's confidences. A suspicion that all was not right within the store was the cause of Dolan's entrance. When he discovered the dead body of his friend and saw that a brutal murder had been committed he rushed out and telephoned to the police station. I was in the office at the time and within fifteen minutes a dozen officers were on the trail of Chetwood Holley. He was not found that night but the next afternoon he was seen to enter a detached wooden shack across the river, between Cambridge and Waterton. There were four of us at his heels when he opened the front door of the shack. After directing my companions, three experienced detectives, to guard the outside, I hastened to the door, found it unlocked and entered. There was no one inside."

"Holley had escaped by the back door, I suppose."

"Nothing of the kind. There was a detective at the rear of the shack and one on each side of it. Holley entered that shack but he did not go out of it." Noting Nick Carter's expression of incredulity, the chief proceeded rapidly: "I know what I am talking about. The shack has but one room and two doors. The back door was bolted on the inside and both windows were fastened. So you see that the young man could not have escaped by either window or door."

"Perhaps he went up the chimney," suggested Nick.

"No, he did not. The chimney has a galvanized iron top not more than eight inches in diameter. I looked up the brick part from the fireplace thinking he might have hidden there, but the space was empty. There was only one other place in which he could have hidden and that was a movable wardrobe on one side of the room near the front door. But he did not go into that for I inspected it before I turned my attention to the chimney. It has double doors and I opened both and had a look at the whole inside. The wardrobe is made of inch stuff and has no false partitions. Convinced that my man was not in the room and could not have escaped from it I went outside and consulted with my detectives."

"They had seen no one leave the shack?"

"No. And, as I have said before, no one did quit the building. It stands in the middle of a large open field and even if Holley could have escaped from it and his movements had been lightning-like he must have been seen. There was no one in the field when we came to the shack and no one either came into it or went out of it while we were there. Talk about mysteries—here is one that beats the Dutch."

"Did you examine the floor?" asked Nick.

"That we did. We took up all the boards, hoping to find a cellar or a tunnel and found neither. The shack is built two feet above the ground and there was nothing under the floor but solid earth. Read me the riddle if you can."

Nick gave the chief a queer look. "You don't believe he vanished into thin air, do you?" he inquired.

"I don't know what to believe," replied the chief, in some irritation. "I have given you the facts. As I remarked when you came in, I am up a stump."

Nick Carter was silent for a few moments. Then he asked: "Did the room contain any furniture beside the wardrobe?"

"The only other article was a broken chair. By the way, we broke that wardrobe into little bits before we left the place."

"It might be a good plan to tear down the shack. Who owns it?"

"Chetwood Holley. I learned as much this morning. His father and mother are dead and the shack and the ground about it comprise the entire estate which the young man inherited. The shack has not been occupied for several years. At one time it was the home of a market gardener, who raised his truck on the grounds."

"And have you no theory regarding the young man's disappearance?"

"You have not been following me to much purpose, or you would not have asked that question," said the chief, sourly.

"Pardon me," replied Nick, pleasantly. "I forgot for the moment, that you mind is in a maze. I don't wonder at it. What you have told me is of a most surprising nature. But there is, there must be, a natural explanation of Holley's disappearance."

"You are the man to find it, Nick."

"I will try to solve the mystery, but I can't promise success. Tell me something more about Holley. Is he a man of more than ordinary shrewdness?"

"I never heard that he is. His friends—and he numbers them by scores—speak of him as generous, honorable, ambitious, not overly brilliant. He is a plodder and there are thousands like him in Boston."

"His employers speak highly of him, do they?"

"Yes. They say that he has made a very efficient clerk and that he is thoroughly trustworthy."

"You have said that Perron's skull was smashed by an iron bar. Did you find the bar?"

"Yes. Here it is." The chief opened a drawer and drew out the weapon of death. It was about two feet long, and was two inches wide and half an inch thick. One end was jagged and uneven showing that the bar had belonged to a longer piece and had been broken off.

The detective looked at it, saw that it was covered with smut and at once formed an opinion as to the use it had originally put to.

"This bar," he said, "was used in an old-fashioned fireplace. It supported the bricks just below the mantel. Perhaps it came from the fireplace in Holley's shack."

"Perhaps it did," replied the chief. "I did not pay any attention to the condition of the fireplace."

"When I leave you I shall go to the shack," said Nick, "and I'll take a look at the fireplace as well as other things in the room."

The detective would have said more but at this juncture the telephone demanded the chief's attention.

While the receiver was at his ear, Nick heard him say these words:

"Yes, this is the chief's office. Oh, Miss Perron, is it? You desire the services of a detective? All right, I'll send to your house the best man in the country. Got some points, have you? Good. You may expect the detective inside of an hour."

The chief hung up the receiver and faced Nick Carter with an eager, confident look in his eyes. "I have been talking with Perron's daughter," he explained. "She believes Chetwood Holley to be innocent of her father's murder and wants a good detective to hunt down the truth. Now that's what we are after, the truth. So I am going to ask you to act for her as well as for us."

"I'll oblige her," returned Nick slowly, "only when I am thoroughly satisfied that Chetwood Holley did not commit the crime. And I think," he added, "that I can make up my mind on that point after I have looked at a photograph of the young man. You have one, of course."

"Yes." From a pigeonhole a photograph was taken and handed to the detective.

Nick Carter looked at the picture for some time. It was that of a smooth faced young man with a frank, honest expression.

"Well," said the chief, "what is your opinion?"

"This young fellow is no murderer. He might, under great provocation, kill a man, but I do not believe he could be guilty of a cold-blooded crime. I'm pretty good at reading faces, and I'll stake my reputation on Chetwood Holley's innocence."

"I'm with you there," said the chief. "Circumstances seem to point to his guilt, but all the same I don't believe his was the hand that slew Thomas Perron. I can account for his hiding, if he is hiding somewhere. He found the dead body of Perron, knew that Dolan saw him enter and leave the store, and realized that he would be suspected and arrested. The prospect frightened him and he went into concealment."

"Where?" asked Nick, as though the matter had never before been considered.

The chief grinned. "In the air, I guess. If he did not become invisible, what did he do with himself?"

"Played a trick on you, maybe," replied Nick coolly.

"How could he have done so?" regarding the detective in amazement.

"I may be able to tell you later. Now to business. I'll call on the young lady and then go over to the shack. Give me its exact location, will you."

After being furnished with this and other information Nick Carter left the office and, boarding a car, rode to a handsome residence on Boylston Street. In a few minutes he was talking with the daughter of the dead book dealer.

Helen Perron, slight in figure, with a pale, interesting face and eyes of deep and tender gray, lost no time in stating her wishes.

"I want you to do two things, Mr. Carter," she said. "You must find Mr. Holley, and you must find and arrest the man who killed my father."

"You say I must. Isn't that putting it—er—rather arbitrarily?" said Nick, mildly.

"No," she responded, firmly. "It is not written that you shall fail."

The great detective shrugged his shoulders. "Well," he replied, "I'll try to deserve your confident opinion and if I fail——"

"You won't," regarding him steadily. "I know all about you."

Nick concluded to drop argument on the subject. Changing his manner, he asked briskly: "Have you anything to tell me, something that may act as a guide in my investigations?"

"I have. Chetwood Holley knows the assassin. Find my—Mr. Holley, and your task will be an easy one."

"Can you help me find him? He has mysteriously vanished and in an unaccountable manner. He went into a shanty, but did not come out of it and yet he is not in it. What became of him?" Nick looked at her curiously.

"I have heard the story, Mr. Carter. It is a strange one. It has puzzled the chief of police, and I am free to confess that it has puzzled me. But I look to you to discover the truth. Perhaps when you visit the building you may come upon something that the chief failed to discover."

"I hope I may. I have a consuming desire to meet the young man. What makes you think he knows the murderer?"

"His act in going to my father's store that night. He must have been lured there by the murderer in order that he might be suspected of the crime. That is the probable explanation of his presence at my father's place of business."

Nick's expression indicated that this statement was not convincing.

Helen Perron calmly proceeded: "I met Mr. Holley downtown an hour before he went into the store. He is a man of his word and he stoutly asserted that he would never speak to father until all objection to our engagement had been withdrawn. His anger against father had evaporated and he was willing to wait and let time bring father to his senses. He w

in a hopeful mood when I parted with him. Do you think that after his talk with me and in his equable state of mind he would go to my father's office?"

"Not for the purpose of murder. But he did go, though."

"Yes and it is my firm belief that after he left me he received a message asking him to go to the book store."

"From your father?"

"The message must have purported to have come from my father. That must be it, for otherwise Chetwood would not have gone."

"Who sent it? Who is his enemy? And who had a deadly grudge against your father?"

"I can't tell you, and yet I think I have a clue. In my father's desk I came upon an envelope with an inclosure which contained three figures nothing more."

"And the figures were?"

"117."

CHAPTER II.

NICK'S IMPORTANT DISCOVERIES.

Nick Carter looked at the mysterious figures and then took up the envelope. The address, "Mr. Thomas Perron, No. — Boylston street, Boston," was written in a clear, business-like hand and with a stub pen. The stamped date was the day preceding the murder.

"I'll retain the envelope and inclosure, if you don't mind," said the detective. "They may lead to something."

The girl nodded assent. "Find the person who wrote the address and the figures and you will have the murderer," she said.

"Perhaps," was the reply. Then he added: "Did your father mention the receipt of this strange missive?"

"No. But he was mentally disturbed during the afternoon before his death. I called at the store twice between twelve and six o'clock and noticed that he was worrying about something. I asked him if he had any business trouble and he shook his head."

She opened her lips to say more, but the words did not come. Nick spoke quickly: "Did he say anything about Holley?"

"Yes," she admitted, after a pause. "He said some harsh words and then told me that he intended to take me to Europe for a year, believing that twelve months' absence would cure me of what he called my infatuation for a worthless fortune hunter."

"I am glad you have told me this," said the detective, "for your father's words seem proof positive that he did not send for Holley."

He paused a moment and studied the girl's face. Its sharp intelligence impressed him. "You must have some reason other than the one you have given me for believing that Holley knows the assassin."

"I have what I consider a reason, though you may not so regard it. One evening last week I was accosted on the street by a roughly dressed man who kept his face concealed, and who said, 'Tell Holley to look out for Jocko. He's loose.' Before I could ask a question the man hurried away."

"Did you carry this warning to Holley?"

"Yes, and he laughed and said that some one was trying to play a joke on him. But after speaking he became silent and I could see that my story had affected him. He did not see fit to confide in me and I asked no questions. To tell the truth I was nettled at his reticence."

"And this warning makes you think that 'Jocko' and the murderer of your father are one and the same person, does it?"

"Yes, and if you will put on your thinking cap you will, I believe, come to the same conclusion."

Nick Carter smiled. "I have done so," he replied, "and my deductions are pretty nearly on a line with yours. The figures, '117,' suggest the number of a convict. That convict may have escaped or may have been recently discharged from prison. The statement, 'Jocko is loose,' appears to imply that 'Jocko' is out of some place of detention. If we couple 'Jocko' with '117,' then it becomes plain that the enemy of your father is the enemy of Chetwood Holley. We will go further and say that Holley, after discovering that he had been lured to a scene of murder by a false message, became convinced that his enemy, the person designated as 'Jocko,' had played the trick on him for the purpose of placing a noose about his neck."

"That is exactly what I believe," Helen Perron said quickly and appreciatively. "The murderer is a fiend and when you find Mr. Holley and learn the real name of 'Jocko,' the hardest part of your work will be over."

Nick made no reply to this. The girl, in whose eyes a fierce hope gleamed, went on, nervously: "When you go to the shack I wish to accompany you."

"I shall be pleased to have you go along, for between us we may be able to discover how Holley made his escape."

"Why not start at once? It is four o'clock and the examination ought to be made in daylight."

Nick had no objection to offer and in a short time they were on a Massachusetts Avenue car bound for Cambridge and the country beyond.

The shack was distant from the car line nearly half a mile, and was reached by a narrow lane.

Arrived at the building they found the front door open and entering saw that the arrangements were exactly as described by the chief of police.

The floor had been taken up and the only furniture consisted of a wardrobe and a broken chair. The wardrobe lay in ruins on one side of the room near the door.

Nick inspected the windows and back door, went over the ground beneath the floor joists and then went to the fireplace. Here he made a discovery. The sup-

porting bar at the top of the opening was not there. A careful examination of the cement coating of the brick which had pressed against the bar showed that the bar had been broken, probably as a result of heat and long usage working on an imperfection in the iron.

The break was near one end, and measuring the space occupied by the longer section of the bar the detective found that it tallied with the length of the weapon that had been used to crush in the head of Thomas Perron.

Nick looked up the chimney and then turned his attention to the wardrobe.

Helen Perron, who had been following him about, asked anxiously as he arose to his feet: "What have you discovered?"

"I have discovered that the iron bar was taken from the fireplace," he answered, soberly.

She looked at him for a moment without speaking. There was both disappointment and anger in the look.

When she spoke, her voice was hard. "So," she said, "you have changed your opinion. You now think——"

"As I thought before," he interrupted quickly. "The bar was taken from this building but not by Chetwood Holley."

Helen Perron's lovely countenance cleared. She became apologetic.

Nick cut short her speech by saying: "The finding of the bar appears to strengthen the case against Holley but it has not caused me to change my opinion. I still believe that he is innocent and that his enemy has with satanic cunning involved him in a network of circumstantial evidence. You saw Holley an hour before the discovery of the murder. At your meeting with him, if murder was then in his heart, he must have had the iron bar concealed about his person or in some spot near the scene of the contemplated crime. You don't believe that, neither do I. You don't believe that Holley, with his honesty, his love for you, his words spoken to you on that occasion, would have been transformed within an hour's time, into a fiend incarnate, one who, not satisfied with slaying his victim with an iron bar, could have added atrocity to atrocity by burying a knife deep in your father's heart.

"I must look for 'Jocko,' the savage, remorseless wretch who lured Holley to the store, who knows all about Holley's private affairs and who came to this shack and with devilish malice wrenched out the broken bar and used it with fatal effect upon Thomas Perron. I may not discover how Holley escaped from this room, but as I am satisfied that he did escape, it is not a matter of great consequence how the act was accomplished. The chief may give me points touching which I did not question him at my talk with him a few hours ago."

They left the shack and Nick parted with the girl at Boylston Street.

Before returning to the chief's office he visited the scene of the murder. There was a keeper in charge and after giving his name, the detective was permitted to enter the book store.

In the office at the rear he spent some time.

Since the removal of the body of the dead man nothing had been disturbed. There was a small desk opposite the door through which the detective had come. A few feet from the desk was another door opening into a large yard used conjointly by the tenants on the block.

Nick Carter went into the yard. Dolan, the saloon keeper, the man who had found the dead body and had notified the police office, was just entering the back door of his place of business. The detective spoke to him and Dolan turned instantly.

He had an honest face and Nick believing he could be trusted, said earnestly: "I am working on the Perron murder case. Perhaps you may be able to help me."

"I have told the chief all I know," was the reply, "and that is enough to settle this fellow, Holley, if you catch him."

"I agree with you, partly. Catching Holley means catching the murderer, but the murderer isn't Holley."

Dolan snorted his contempt at this statement.

"Why, it is as plain as A B C that he killed the old man. Didn't I see him come out of the store all in a tremble, and didn't I find the old man dead when I went into the store a minute afterward?"

"Holley exhibited cunning after he left the store, didn't he?" the detective quietly asked.

"Sure. He has pulled the wool over the chief's eyes, all right."

"Then why did he not show cunning before he left the store? If he is the murderer, he would have done so, wouldn't he? Is it likely that he killed the old man, then walked out of the front door to be seen by you or some one else, when he could have watched his chance, slipped into your saloon or through the back door of some other saloon and made good his escape without leaving any tracks? Do you think that a man could commit a cold-blooded murder, such as this one was, and then act like a fool?"

The saloon keeper scratched his head. But he was not yet ready to give in. "Maybe he lost his wits for a few moments after the killing," he said.

"Nonsense. A man of the mental calibre of Perron's slayer, a man with heart dead to mercy, to every attribute of manhood, would not lose his wits after the commission of an atrocious crime. He would have them and he would use them. Consider the case for a moment. Chetwood Holley boldly enters the store by the front door. He was willing that anyone should see him, for he made no attempt to conceal his face. He came out the same way and you saw him on both occasions. You say he was in a tremble. There is an explanation for his state of mind. As an innocent party he had come upon the dead body of a man who had just been murdered. Of course the spectacle startled, unnerved him."

"If he is innocent, why is he in hiding?"

"Because he realizes that the finger of suspicion will point to him. He does not desire to go to jail. Perhaps he has made up his mind to hunt down the murderer. He could not do this if he were locked up, could he?"

Dolan pondered the matter. "Begorra, I believe you are right," was his spoken conclusion. "The young man hasn't the face of a murderer. If I were in his place I would leave the country."

"I don't believe it. You would do as Chetwood Holley is doing. You would stay here and try to prove your innocence."

"Maybe I would, maybe I would. And," he added, "the first thing I would do would be to send for Nick Carter."

"Nick Carter is already in the case."

"Good. I'm glad to hear that. Do you know the man?"

"I have seen him."

"What kind of a looking man is he?"

"Well, he is of my height and build, has my face and when last seen he was talking with an honest gentleman named Dolan."

The saloon keeper stared at the smiling detective. "Well, I'll be blowed," he said. Then he laughed. "This is one on me. Come inside."

Nick went in and was soon on confidential terms with the saloon keeper. "How many saloons are there on this block?" he asked, after they seated themselves in the card room.

"Mine is the only one."

"Were there many strangers in your place on the evening of the murder?"

"I don't recall the face of but one stranger."

"Did you see him before or after your discovery of the dead body of Thomas Perron?"

"Before. Let me see, it must have been half an hour before I saw Holley leave the store that the stranger came into the saloon."

"Can you describe him?"

"In a manner. He was well dressed and looked as if he had just got out of a sick bed. His face was long and thin, his cheeks were sunken and he was of the color or no-color of a corpse. I also noticed that his hair was cut short and that it was black streaked with gray."

"Did he buy a drink?"

"Yes, and then I lost track of him. There were several of my regular patrons in the saloon at the time and their wants demanded my attention after the stranger had had his drink. I did not see him go out."

"Might he not have gone out by way of the back door?"

"Sure and I'll gamble that is the way he did go. There are three lodging houses on the block and with the convenience of the common yard, the stranger, if he is the murderer, might have escaped through one of them."

Pursuing his inquiries after leaving the saloon, Nick soon learned that a man answering the description of Dolan's stranger had been seen coming out of one of the lodging houses at about the time of the discovery of the murder.

It was evening when the detective returned to the office of the chief of police. After stating the discoveries he had made he asked:

"If I have got your statement pat, you went through the door of the shack, examined the wardrobe, cast your eyes about the room and then walked to the fireplace and stooping, looked up the chimney."

"That's right."

"How long were you at the fireplace?"

"About a minute."

"One more question. Give me the exact position of the wardrobe."

"It was about four feet from and on the same side as the door."

"Good. Now I understand how Chetwood Holley made his escape from the room."

The chief regarded Nick Carter in surprise mingled with admiration.

"I knew if anybody could solve the riddle you could. How did you work it?"

"By using my eyes and putting myself in Holley's place. Here is the way the fugitive must have operated: He went into the shack, threw the door wide open as he did so and concealed himself behind it. The door opened toward the wardrobe. From his hiding place Holley could have touched it. When he saw you with your back turned looking up the chimney he left the door and softly stepped into the wardrobe. I must presume that you had closed the doors after your inspection of that piece of furniture."

"Yes, I think I did," said the chief, whose countenance showed that he was intensely interested in Nick's inductive exposition.

"Then, of course, Holley closed the doors after entering. You did not give the wardrobe another inspection and in a short time you were outside conferring with your subordinates. It was now dusk and before you again entered the shack to tear up the floor, Holley must have slipped out and concealed himself in the grass. There he remained until you and your men had left the field."

The detective paused and looked smilingly at the chief whose head was lowered. When he raised it he said in a tone of deep disgust: "Nick, I ought to be kicked from here to Jericho for making such a confounded ass of myself. I ought to have looked behind the door the first thing. But I was excited and——"

"I understand," interrupted the detective. Then he added in order to put the officer in better humor: "I was not circumstanced as you were. I went into the shack, not in hot pursuit of a suspected murderer, but as a cool investigator, having plenty of time at my disposal and with nothing to flurry me. Had I been in your place I might have done as you did."

"I don't think so. If you had you would not have

acted up to your reputation. But enough on this subject. We know how Holley escaped, but we don't know where he is hiding. Without his knowledge of the identity of the murderer it will be uphill work trying to discover who '117' is."

"I agree with you if '117' was not a recent inmate of the State prison."

"I don't think he was. What is your opinion?"

"It had occurred to me that he might be, chief, but after calmly considering the matter I have come to the conclusion that the number has reference to something not within the knowledge of either the general public or the police. It would be an act of idiocy for a shrewd and cunning criminal as Perron's murderer undoubtedly is, to leave behind such damaging evidence as his prison number. But it is well to make sure. Get out your book and we'll look over the list of discharges and escapes for the past six months."

The book was brought forth and Nick's theory was verified. No prisoner answering the description of the stranger who was in Dolan's saloon a short time before the murder had left the State prison during the period referred to.

"You must find Holley," was the chief's comment after the book had been put away.

"I may be able to discover the secret of '117' without the aid of Holley," replied Nick, quietly. "I am satisfied that '117' has been in some place of confinement from which he has recently come, for the words of warning uttered by the roughly dressed man who accosted Miss Perron point to that conclusion. But the number has no penal significance, though it conveyed a strong meaning to Thomas Perron. You have been in office four years, I believe. During that period has Perron ever appeared as a witness or juror in a criminal case?"

The chief puckered his brows. "No," he said. "He was sixty-five years of age when he died and that fact settles the juror question. And I am positive that he was never on the stand as a witness."

"Then the grudge—I am assuming that there was one—which '117' harbored against Perron, took a beginning more than four years ago. I'll call up Miss Perron and see if she cannot give me the information I want."

The great detective went to the phone and soon had the ear of the dead man's daughter.

Asked if she knew whether or not her father had ever been a witness in a criminal case she answered that about eight years ago he had been the prosecuting witness in a burglary case. She did not recall all the circumstances but there was one fact that stood clear in her memory and that was that the prisoner and her father had been members of a secret organization that lived less than a year.

Nick Carter hung up the receiver and turned to the chief. "Have you any recollection," said he, "of a secret order that had a brief existence eight or nine years ago?"

"Yes," was the quick answer. "The meetings were held in a hall a few doors below my father's place of business. I was a clerk in the store at the time and I remember that Perron was a member."

"What was the name of the order?"

"'The Helping Friends.'"

"Do you know what were the objects?"

"It was common report that it was a citizens' movement for the suppression of crime."

"And the members had numbers, not names, didn't they?"

"Yes."

"Who was the secretary, clerk, scribe, keeper of the records, or whatever they called the member who kept the books? Do you know?"

"No, but Lawyer Timmins, who has an office a few doors below here, was a member. He can probably tell you."

"I'll see him in the morning." Nick was about to say more when the telephone bell rang.

The chief answered it. "This the chief's office."

"Yes."

"Then send officers immediately to the Perron residence. An attempt will be made to-night to abduct Miss Perron. That's all. Good-by."

"But—look here—who are you?"

No answer. The unknown informer had hung up and thus cut off questioning.

After Nick had been given the words of the warning message he suggested that central be called and the place from which the message had been sent be ascertained.

The reply was discouraging. The message had come from a public station.

"The message probably came from the man who warned Miss Perron," said Nick. "I believe he was a former confederate of '117' and that he had forsaken his evil ways. But he is mortally afraid of '117,' and therefore dares not show himself here. It would not surprise me to learn that he was also a member of the 'Helping Friends.' If the roll of members can be found I may find it useful when I go over the records of the trial at which Thomas Perron was a witness."

No more was said on the subject, for the abduction matter demanded instant attention.

Nick went with the force of officers to the Perron residence. As it was designed to capture the would-be abductor or abductors, the utmost circumspection in approaching the house was used.

All was quiet when Nick, who was in advance, arrived in sight of the building. Although it was not yet ten o'clock there was no light in any of the windows.

After waiting half an hour the detective walked to a house across the street from the Perron place and pressed the electric button at the door. The house was lighted up and presently a maid appeared. Instead of asking to see the master or mistress Nick, who was wise, turned his batteries on the girl, who had a sharp, inquisitive countenance.

After stating that he was a detective he asked if she knew whether or not Miss Perron had had any callers that evening.

The answer surprised him.

"She went away in a cab about an hour ago. A tall man came for her."

"She went willingly, did she?"

"Yes. I was at the gate when the cab drove up. The tall man went to the door and he did not speak more than half a dozen words to Miss Perron. She heard him, then went inside and was gone not more than five minutes, just long enough to put on her coat and hat."

"Did she say anything to the man after she came out of the house?"

"Not a word. She entered the cab, the man got in after her and they went off in a hurry."

Nick left the house and called the chief's officers together.

The girl had not noticed the driver of the cab and so there was no longer any need for their remaining in the vicinity.

But Nick did not go to his room until he had tried to ascertain if any order for a vehicle had been given by the tall suspect at any of the cab stations in the city.

His inquiries led to no result, and he was forced to conclude that the cab was an independent one and that the driver had been bribed to keep his mouth shut.

Before seeking rest he wired Chick.

Early next morning he was at the chief's house.

"Couldn't wait for the office hour," he explained. "I came here in hope that you had again heard from the person who sent the warning last night."

"So I have. A message came here less than half an hour ago. The sender said that '117' had operated quicker than he, the man talking, had anticipated. Deception had been used but if I would follow the advice of one who desired to see right prevail, the girl could easily be rescued and the abductor arrested."

"What was the advice?"

"To come at three o'clock this afternoon to a certain lodging house on Clinton street. The girl and the abductor would be found in room 24."

"Is that all?" as the chief paused.

"Yes. The unknown hung up and I learned that he was again using a public 'phone."

Nick looked thoughtfully at the floor. "Chief,' he said, after a pause, "I am going down to that house now. The girl may be there. The object of the person who phoned you is to cause the arrest of '117,' whom he hates as well as fears. When he said in effect that three o'clock this afternoon will find both the girl and her abductor in the room, he meant that the villain would not be found there before that time. I wish to take Miss Perron away from that house as soon as possible. With her out of the room we can more easily manage '117.' When he comes to see his prisoner he will meet not Helen Perron but your humble servant."

"Do you wish to go alone?" inquired the chief.

"Yes. The place is probably watched and if more than one goes, suspicion might be aroused and the bird fly away. I shall go in disguise and as a stranger inquiring for a room."

The plan was carried out. Nick went to his quarters on Temple street and half an hour after his departure from the chief's office a stoutly built man who looked as if he might be a mechanic was talking with the landlady of the lodging house on Clinton street.

The detective was not favorably impressed with the appearance and manner of the woman. She was tall, angular and hard-featured and her eyes were small and like gimlets. After one sharp scrutiny she looked over her shoulder and winked at a maid with a broom who was standing a few feet back of her.

Nick Carter did not see the wink but he knew that some communication was made, for the maid immediately left the hall.

Before the action of the landlady, the disguised detective had stated that he wished to secure a room for a week.

After the departure of the maid the woman opened her mouth to say that she had but one vacant room and that if he desired to see it she would take him to it.

On one side of the hall was a small reading room. The door was open and the landlady had no sooner finished her statement than a surprise greeted her. Nick, with a lightning-like movement, flung himself upon her. His right arm encircled her waist and his left hand closed her mouth. Then she was lifted and borne to the reading room which luckily had no occupant.

Despite the woman's struggles she was soon bound and gagged.

CHAPTER III.

AN EXCITING EXPERIENCE.

Having disposed of the landlady, Nick Carter went softly to the door and looked into the hall. Seeing no one he pressed the bell button and then slipped back into the reading room.

In less than a half a minute the maid came running in. When she saw the detective and the revolver pointed at her head, her impulse was to scream, but these warning words, uttered just above a whisper stopped her mouth: "One word, one scream and I'll shoot."

The maid's eyes rolled wildly and she seemed about to collapse. "Come here," commanded Nick and the girl, with unsteady limbs, approached the detective.

"Now," said he, in a tone that made her shiver, "it all depends upon the answers you give to my questions

whether or not I take you to police headquarters and have you locked up."

"I'll tell you anything you want to know," she tremblingly replied.

"That is well. First question: What did the signal you received from the landlady mean?"

"It meant that I should remove a lodger from one room to another."

"You are evading the question," said Nick, sternly. "Tell the plain truth or I'll take you in charge."

The maid realizing that she had a master mind to deal with came quickly to the point.

"The signal meant that I was to take Miss Perron from room twenty-four and put her in the cellar."

"She expected a visit from the police, did she?"

"No, though she had heard that Nick Carter is in town and that fact scared her. It might be that he would get into the case."

"What case?"

The maid did not answer. She bit her lip and her eyes sought the floor.

"You have not said too much," said Nick, quietly, "for I am the man your mistress is afraid of. So speak up and admit that the case is one of murder as well as abduction."

The maid's face turned as pale as death. She shot one glance at Nick and then walked to a chair and began to cry.

When she was able to command her voice she said: "I ain't to blame. I ain't to blame. I was took out of a refuge and Mrs. Smithers made me do things I didn't want to do, threatening if I got contrary she would have me arrested for stealing. I haven't stole anything but I knew Mrs. Smithers could cook up a case against me and so I did what she asked me to do."

"And what did she ask you to do?"

"To see that Miss Perron did not leave her room and that 'Jocko' was not interfered with."

"Who is Jocko?" There was no hint of eagerness in the detective's voice. The girl gazed at him in surprise.

"Don't you know?" she asked.

"I might guess," was the answer, "but I would prefer to have you enlighten me."

"He is Mrs. Smithers' brother."

"That is not all the explanation I require. Go on."

"He is an escape from a lunatic asylum."

"Crazy, is he?"

"No and he never was crazy. He played crazy so that he could beat the law. He was a burglar and the police had a case against him and he would have gone to prison if he hadn't gone daffy."

"Accused of stealing the property of Thomas Perron, wasn't he?"

"Yes. How did you find it out?"

Nick had made a shrewd guess but it was not necessary that he should admit it. "It does not matter how I obtained my information," he replied. "I know more," he added. "I know that he is trying forcible blackmail on Miss Perron and that he is the fiend who killed her father."

The maid made no reply to this. "Now," continued Nick, "you must take me to the place where Miss Perron is concealed."

The girl arose and walked toward the door. The detective followed after he assured himself that the landlady was in no condition to give trouble. As Nick stooped over her and felt of the gag she gave him a look that spelled murder.

The cellar where the maid had said that Miss Perron was confined was reached by a trap in the kitchen. The girl lifted the door and pointed to the stairs. "She's down there. Perhaps if you call her, she will come up."

Nick thought this good advice and stooping by the opening he shouted: "Miss Perron, a friend has come for you."

As the words left his lips he heard a rush of feet from behind, but before he could turn, powerful hands sent him tumbling down the stairs. As he struck the cement floor the trap was closed and locked.

The detective was getting to his feet and rubbing an aching head when a soft, tremulous voice said: "Who are you?"

It was Helen Perron who spoke. Nick could not see her on account of the darkness but he instantly replied: "I am a fool. I thought I was Nick Carter."

"Oh, I am so glad," was the quick response.

"Are you?" said Nick drily. But he immediately added: "You must pardon my grumpiness. I don't feel in an exuberant mood. I set out this morning to find and bring you to your home and here I am, caged."

"You will escape from this cellar," she returned, confidently.

"Perhaps you can suggest a way," he said. "There are no windows and the only door is shut and locked."

"There is an air shaft," eagerly. "I have been trying to make use of it."

"Guide me to it and I will see what can be done."

The air shaft was in the middle of the cellar and under it was an empty box. Standing upon it Nick found that he could reach the shaft opening. But no light came down the hole. The detective drew a sharp breath. He divined what had been done. The shaft had been obstructed at the first floor and could not be utilized as a means of escape.

"Well," said Helen Perron, anxiously as he jumped from the box. "What do you think?"

"I think our common enemy has taken pains to prevent our leaving this cellar."

"Then we are without hope," she despairingly responded.

"I don't know as to that. I have not yet completed my investigations." Nick spoke cheerfully, though he felt blue enough.

He lighted a match and began a systematic survey of the cellar. Nothing to give hope was found until he stooped in front of the iron pipe which was the

connecting link between the kitchen sink trap and the stone sewer. This pipe was secured to the floor joists and was exposed for its entire length. It was cemented into the sewer pipe in a corner.

Nick stood on the box brought from under the air shaft and listened for sounds from the kitchen. Hearing no voices and no movement from above he said to Miss Perron: "I have found a way of escape. It may not work for I may be interrupted, but as our case is a desperate one I am going to try it."

"I don't see," she began, when the detective cut in quickly.

"My plan is to break through the floor and get into the kitchen. First I shall wrench that lead pipe holding the trap of the sink from its connection with the iron pipe. When I do that the sewer gas will pour out of the iron pipe. Our handkerchiefs will be required to stop the hole and confine the gas, that is, the most of it, for some part of it will escape as we can't hermetically seal the opening. But I think we will be able to stand the smell for the short period of time that will elapse before I can let in a flood of air from the kitchen. Here goes."

Nick grasped the lead pipe and exerting all his strength, soon tore it from the pipe of iron. Instantly the foul-smelling sewer gas began to pour into the cellar, but the volume was quickly checked by the use of the handkerchiefs.

Before proceeding further the detective again listened for sounds from above. The silence caused him to believe that the occupants of the house were either in one of the front rooms or in the second story.

"Now," said he to the girl, "I shall twist the lead pipe from the fastening to the sink and pull it down here."

This was done and through the small hole in the floor previously filled by the pipe a current of cool, refreshing air came down.

Mounting the box Nick with his knife cut away at the board from the hole to its junction with the surrounding pieces of lumber. This work accomplished, he was furnished with the necessary purchase for pushing upward and breaking one of the sections of the severed flooring. The rest, for one of his strength and determination, was easy.

Ten minutes from the time of beginning Nick and Helen Perron were out of the cellar. The fact that his work, carried on with considerable noise, had not been interrupted, was most encouraging, and the detective, now believing that there were no persons on the lower floor of the house, was about to leave the kitchen for the front when Helen Perron, who was behind him, uttered a scream of terror.

Nick Carter turned quick as a flash to see the girl struggling in the arms of the villainous landlady and to see also the head and shoulders of a man above the opening in the floor.

The man, whose undercoat was red and short grey hair covered the description of the stranger who had been in Dolan's saloon just before the murder, looked into Nick's eyes and then his right hand came up and —two reports rang out simultaneously. Both apparently took effect for the man dropped out of sight and the detective fell to the floor.

Nick Carter was not hurt, the bullet fired by a murderous hand having passed close to the intended victim's head, owing to an instinctive duck made in the nick of time. The fall was a feint and the action was a wise one, for the landlady, as the two pistols cracked flung Helen Perron to the floor and whipping out a pocket revolver prepared to finish the detective should such a course seem to be necessary.

Nick lay still upon the floor with his eyes closed and his face covered by an arm.

Mrs. Smithers walked to the side of the prostrate and apparently dead detective and gave the body a vicious kick.

No groan, no movement followed the action.

The woman, not entirely satisfied, was debating whether or not to fire a shot, when a faint voice from the cellar caused her to turn her head toward the opening. The voice said: "All right up there?"

"I think so," was the reply. "How is it with you?"

"Bullet grazed my neck, I'll come up in a minute."

"Then"—the landlady said no more, for Nick, who had quickly arisen had her by the throat. The struggle was short. Mrs. Smithers was all bone and muscle but Nick Carter was a very Hercules in strength and beside was materially assisted by Helen Perron.

Bound and gagged for the second time the woman was placed in a corner and then Nick stepped close to the hole and imitating Mrs. Smithers' coarse voice called: "Hello, Jocko! All right now."

There was no answer. At the risk of encountering a bullet, Nick flattened on the floor and looked down the hole. The light was faintn and he could see that the space directly under the hole was vacant.

Quickly rising to his feet, he handed Mrs. Smithers' pistol to Helen Perron and with the words, "stay here until I return," hurried out of the kitchen.

On one side of the corridor midway between the kitchen and the front door there was an open door. Reaching it Nick saw that the opening exposed the air shaft. The villain, Jocko, had removed the obstruction and made his way below by means of the shaft and it was probable that he had made his escape from the cellar in the same way.

Time was precious but the detective determined to learn at once whether or not the cellar had an occupant.

Sliding down the shaft he landed on the cellar floor, pistol in hand. He could see the opening in the kitchen floor and soon was able to take in all the proportions of the underground room. Jocko was gone.

Up to the kitchen went the detective to find things as he had left them.

The house was of two stories and before Nick left the place he investigated every room upstairs. There were two furnished rooms. One had evidently been

occupied by a man, the other by a woman. In the man's room the detective spent some time.

The personal belongings of the occupant were not many. There was a suit case, well filled, and a few articles on a small pine table close to the bed. Nick examined everything but found nothing save a letter to interest him. The letter was directed to Jocko Smithers and bore the Boston postmark. The date was of the existing day and was written by a person who signed himself "119." "Jocko," it said, "I have considered the matter and have concluded to stay out. I am in an honest business as you know, and I don't care to go back to the old, risky ways. You play your hand and I'll play mine."

There was no evidence to show that the writer was the man who had warned Chetwood Holley and yet Nick was seized with the conviction that such was the case. The man who had given the warning knew Jocko Smithers and the warning was proof that he was not in sympathy with Smithers' felonious schemes. The letter also was evidence that the writer knew all about Jocko and did not approve of Jocko's way of life.

"It is probable," thought the detective, "that Jocko and the writer were once pals and that the separation came when Jocko was arrested and imprisoned at the instance of Thomas Perron. When Jocko secured his freedom, which must have been quite recently, he hunted up his former confederate and asked his co-operation in a villainous plot. The matter must have been taken under advisement, the pal of former days not daring, through fear of Jocko, to express unwillingness in the villain's presence."

There was a telephone in the house and Nick called up the police station and waited until the arrival of the patrol wagon. Having disposed of Mrs. Smithers and having told the patrol driver that he would soon report at the station, the detective accompanied Helen Perron to her home. On the way she stated that she had been lured to the lodging house. A man claiming to be a messenger from Chetwood Holley had come to her house with the oral message that Holley wished to see her immediately.

Before he left her, Nick promised to have a guard placed outside her residence until the enemy should be rendered powerless for harm.

At the police station he met the chief and after explaining matters said that Miss Perron would not prosecute Mrs. Smithers if the woman would furnish information that would lead to the arrest of her brother.

"She'll never squeal," remarked the chief, with a shake of the head. "I know her kind. She is as bad as her brother and she'll never betray him."

"I am of your opinion," said Nick, "but Miss Perron has an idea that a few days' imprisonment will make the woman open her mouth. So let the complaint matter stand open for a while."

His business with the chief finished for the time being, the detective went to the courthouse and looked over criminal records and papers until he came upon the proceedings in the case of the People *vs.* Smithers, for burglary.

Thomas Perron led the list of witnesses and after copying all the names Nick went to the Globe office and was permitted to examine the bound volumes of the year of the Smithers' trial.

The defendant had burglarized the office of Perron and had been convicted, all the stolen goods having been found in his possession.

It had appeared in evidence that Smithers was a member of the "Helping Friends" and that he had taken advantage of Perron's confidence to acquire a knowledge of the book dealer's business habits and personal affairs. He had frequently visited the store as a friend and had been quick to discover how the place might be entered for the purpose of robbery.

The evidence that led to the burglar's discovery and arrest could not be controverted though an attempt to prove an alibi was made, the witness called by Smithers for this purpose being one James Kingman, a fellow member of the "Helping Friends." He had sworn that on the night in question, Jocko Smithers had been in South Boston.

Kingman's testimony was weakened when the prosecution proved that he had once served a term in prison and that his cell mate was the man he was now trying to protect.

Smithers was convicted and would have been sent to prison if he had not suddenly gone insane. At least the examining physicians pronounced him mentally incapacitated and upon their report he was conveyed to an asylum.

The foreman of the jury at the trial was Hermon Holley and Nick soon learned that he was the father of Chetwood Holley, the young man who had disappeared.

It was late in the afternoon when Nick left the courthouse.

On the street the newsboys were crying the scare heads of the evening papers.

"Carnival of Crime in San Francisco—Mysterious murder in South Boston—Headless body of a woman found in a trunk."

The detective bought a paper and at once turned to the column which contained the account of the mysterious murder.

The item was a short one, having been turned in just before the paper went to press. But it was double leaded and in big type and Nick's eyes shone with excitement as he read it.

The proprietor of a lodging house in South Boston hearing groans proceeding from the room of one of his lodgers entered to find the lodger in the throes of death. He was lying on the floor in a pool of blood and examination showed that he had been stabbed in the neck and in the breast. He died without speaking. No one had been seen to enter the room and the affair was involved in the deepest mystery. The name of the murdered man was Jarrot Kingman and he had until recently been employed in a factory. The lodg-

ing house proprietor knew him as a man of steady habits and never heard that he had any enemies.

The detective had the paper in his hand when some one slapped him on the shoulder. He turned and looked into the face of his brave and keen-witted assistant, Chick.

"Just came from the police headquarters, Nick, and was told that you were at the courthouse. What's up? You look pretty sober. Struck a tough case?"

"It is not an easy one," was the reply, "but now that you are here, I hope it can be worked to a successful finish. Where's Patsy? Couldn't he come?"

"He'll be here late to-night, or early to-morrow morning."

"Then come to my room and I'll explain the situation."

An hour later and the story had been told. Chick's quick comment was: "This Jocko is an ugly customer. Of course he killed Kingman."

"It looks that way. Kingman is probably the man who warned Chetwood Holley and who notified the chief that Miss Perron would be found at the house on Clinton street. Smithers guessed that Kingman had betrayed him when he found me at the house trying to upset his plans and as soon as he escaped from the cellar he must have gone straight to South Boston and murdered the informer."

"That's right and the next victim will be Holley. Smithers has got it in for the young man, as the plot to fasten upon him the murder of Perron plainly shows. Holley's father was foreman of the jury that convicted Smithers and the villain has resolved to make the son pay for the act of the father."

Nick who had been sitting by the window which overlooked the street, now spoke quietly and without moving in his chair: "Chick, there is a young woman on the sidewalk across the street who seems to take some interest in this room. She wears a brown tailor-made suit and straw hat with no other trimming than a large brown ostrich feather.

"There are no gloves on her hands, but there is a mitt on one, a brown mitt. There is a brown veil over her face, but I know her by her long waist, sloping shoulders and the way she carried her head. She is the maid who showed me into the kitchen of the Smithers' lodging house. After the shooting she left the house, for I searched it from top to bottom and could not find her. In my opinion she is now acting as a spy for Jocko. She has not seen you and therefore you are the man to follow and find out where she goes. You may be able to locate the hiding place of the murderer of Thomas Perron and James Kingman. Quick, for she is moving off. She has seen my face and thus made sure that I am staying here. Report to the police station for I shall at once change my quarters."

Chick was off before Nick finished speaking.

An hour later the great detective, having secured rooms in another section of the city, boarded a car and went to the Perron residence.

It was after dark when he went up the steps to the vestibule.

A maid answered his ring. Before he could speak, she asked: "Are you Mr. Nicholas Carter?"

"I am," said Nick, in some surprise.

"Then this note is for you." So saying the girl handed him a sealed envelope.

Breaking it open quickly the detective read these words:

"DEAR MR. CARTER: I have left home and may not return for a week. I have gone with Chetwood Holley. I found him at the house when I returned to-day. He refuses to show himself in public and says he will remain in hiding until the murderer of my father has been captured. He suspects Jocko Smithers and is going to search for him until he finds him. Chetwood believes that in spite of the precautions you have taken to prevent a second abduction it would not be safe for me to stay at home while Jocko Smithers is at large. He is very grateful for what you have done in the way of clearing his good name and hopes to meet you before many days. I may write again soon.

"Faithfully yours,

"HELEN PERRON."

There was a frown on the detective's brow at the close of the reading.

"At what hour did you mistress leave the house?" he said to the maid.

"Just before dark—about an hour ago."

"A young man was with her, was he not?"

"No, an old man."

"Who was he?"

"Doesn't the note state?" inquired the girl, innocently.

"No. Describe the man, please."

"He was tall, had snow-white hair, long white whiskers, was dressed in a black suit, carried a gold-headed cane and wore gold-rimmed spectacles. Miss Perron said he was a dear friend who had come to her assistance."

Nick left the house greatly dissatisfied with the actions of the daughter of the murdered man. "This Holley person has determined to play detective and evidently thinks he can carry on the game without help. He has prevailed upon Miss Perron to conceal her destination and he does not intend to call upon me while Jocko Smithers is out of jail. I have a good mind to throw up the case and let this ambitious youngster run it to suit himself."

Nick viciously bit off the end of a cigar. A few puffs restored his equanimity. "Pshaw," he said to himself. "I mustn't let a little thing like this bother me. I am in to stay. If Holley wins out, well and good. If he doesn't I may do a little business. I wonder how Chick has fared? If he has succeeded in locating the murderer, there may be something doing to-night."

The detective went to police headquarters and talked with the chief until midnight.

But, while he waited, no report came from Chick.

Somewhat uneasy in mind he left the station and proceeded to his new quarters.

As he could lessen the distance by a diagonal use of the Common, he concluded to take that way.

He was nearly across the Common and was passing the stairway to the subway station when there came the patter of feet behind him and a woman's voice spoke, almost into his ear: "Oh, Mr. Carter? I am glad I have caught you."

Nick turned and the electric light disclosed the face of the maid that Chick had been ordered to shadow.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DETECTIVES TRAPPED.

Nick Carter saw that the maid was greatly agitated. She clung to his arm and tried to continue speaking and failing, began to cry hysterically.

The detective made no effort to comfort her. He waited coolly until she was able to again use her voice.

"You—you are in danger," she said. "I have come here to warn you."

"Where is my assistant?" he demanded, sternly.

"He is in the power of Jocko Smithers."

"He is, eh? And are you prepared to admit that you lured him into a trap?"

"Yes. I am ready to confess everything. Up to an hour ago, I was the tool of a bad man. Not a willing tool," she went on, earnestly, "but one who acted through fear. I did lead your assistant into a trap but when I heard Jocko say that he intended to send your man to join Thomas Perron, I found the moral courage to forsake my evil courses and try to repair the wicked work that I had done. I did not tell Jocko what was in my mind but as soon as I could get away from the place where your assistant is confined I hurried to the police station to find you. The captain in charge said that you had just gone out. Luckily I soon caught sight of you."

"You said I was in danger," said Nick, as she paused. "Will you kindly explain?"

"Yes. Jocko Smithers said tonight that he should pay his attention to you within twenty-four hours. He would send you a note, purporting to have been written by your man, imploring you to come to his assistance. In his opinion you would bite and his work would be easy."

"Did he suppose that I would accept as genuine a note not in the handwriting of Chick?"

"Oh, no, just the contrary. He said he would send the note by a messenger, who would be instructed as to the part he should play. According to Jocko's conception of your ability and your way of doing business, you would take the note as bogus and at the same time put down the author as a very bungling operator. Instead of acting upon the urgent request contained in the note you would shadow the messenger. You begin to see, don't you, Mr. Carter?"

"Yes, I begin to see," replied Nick, quietly.

"The messenger, a faithful tool of Jocko Smithers," the maid went on, "would lead you into the same trap that had caught your assistant."

"A very neat scheme," remarked the detective, dryly. "I am greatly obliged to you for exposing it."

The maid's countenance brightened. But soon she began to tremble.

Nick regarded her curiously.

"I have cut loose from that horrible man, Jocko, and yet I am afraid—afraid that he will find and kill me."

"I will protect you," said Nick, soothingly. "Besides, if you will guide me to his lair, I may be able quickly to put it out of his power to harm you."

This suggestion restored the girl's composure. She smiled as she replied: "Of course I will do that. I know where he is at this moment. He is amusing himself with Chick."

"We must interfere with that amusement."

As Nick spoke, a young man with a sporty look and get-up walked past them. The girl started as her eyes met the young man's and she might have spoken to him if her attention had not suddenly been given to her companion who had fallen to the walk in what appeared to be a fit. His contortions, the froth that issued from between his lips and his wildly rolling eyes frightened the girl and she uttered a scream which quickly brought the sporty young man to the spot.

"What have yer copped, Meg?" he asked. "A farmer with a load on?"

"I don't know," she whispered. Then as she saw a policeman approaching, she continued, rapidly: "You'll help me out in this game won't you?"

"Sure. I'm your lemon-squeezer, all right. But what's ther lay?"

"I'll explain after awhile," she replied, still in a whisper. "What I must do now is to get this man here into a cab and have him taken to a house on Richmond Street."

"Will the mark go if he gets his block in workin' order?"

"I'll see that he does," was the confident answer. "Hush, now. Here is the cop."

Nick Carter was lying motionless with his eyes closed when the policeman came up.

"What happened to him?" the officer asked as he turned two red, suspicious eyes on the girl and the young sport.

"He fell in a fit a minute ago," promptly responded the girl. "He is a friend of mine and I was talking to him quietly when down he goes."

Nick opened his eyes and began to mutter something about "business" and "home."

The policeman raised the detective's head and asked: "How are ye falin', me mon?"

"Weak as a cat. Get me home, can't you?"

His eyes fell on the maid. "She'll take me where I want to go?" he went on.

"Ye knows her, do ye?"

"Yes, she's my friend."

Satisfied that everything was all right the officer found a cab and the detective was assisted into it. With him went the maid. The sporty young man, after the girl had whispered something into his ear, got on the seat with the driver.

"Where do you want to go?" inquired the maid when all was ready for the start.

Nick named a place on Beach Street.

The number was communicated to the driver.

At the same moment the young sport whispered something to the man who held the reins.

The cab rolled over the pavement and after many turns stopped in front of a tumble-down building a short distance from the Commercial wharf.

Nick Carter seemed to be in a deep sleep when the driver pulled open the door.

The maid was the first to alight. When the young sport had joined her on the ground she said in a low voice: "Now comes the hard work. If he wakes up and is in full possession of his senses he'll see that he has been tricked."

"I'll waltz into ther cab an' slip a gag into his jaws an' tie him up. The driver has been fixed. I handed him out a good dope. I told him that ther man is bug-house an' that you're his wife an' I'm his brother. See?"

The maid shot the young sport a glance of admiration. "Dicky," said she, "you're a bird. We have not known each other long, but I'll show you before long that you have butted into a big money game."

"That's all right, Meg," was the quick reply. "You'n me are goin' ter pull together after this." He said no more but entered the cab and finding the detective huddled up on the seat with his eyes closed, proceeded to bind and gag him.

The operation concluded he called to the driver and with that worthy's assistance the victim was carried into the house. The maid who had a key opened the door.

The building was a one-story affair, and adjoined an old, abandoned warehouse. It contained four rooms, two on each side of a corridor that ran from front to back.

Into one of the rear rooms the helpless detective was placed.

It had been used as a sleeping apartment and was provided with a bed and other furnishings.

After a lamp—there was no gas connection—had been lighted, Meg and the young sport sat down and looked at each other.

"Who runs this crib?" asked the man.

"My employer. He is out now, but we'll see him before midnight."

"What's ther game?"

"I'll ask you a question first. You know that fellow on the floor, don't you?"

"Sure. I spotted him when he was doin' ther epilepsy stunt. He's Nick Carter, a man who has no use for Dick Benny."

"I thought you knew him," said the maid with a satisfied expression. "Well, he is down on my employer's blacklist and he has got to walk the plank."

"You was handin' him a lemon when I passed you in ther Common, I don't think."

"I was, but I might not have got him to take it if he hadn't tumbled in that fit."

Benny was silent for a moment. He scratched his head as if seeking for an idea. Having found one he said: "Ther mark that puts up Nick Carter for a mutt is off his trolley. That fit was trun for effect."

The maid's face paled. But presently the color returned.

"Yes," continued Benny, "he made that play so that you could take him to this crib but at the time he made it he hadn't taken me into his calculations. He was aimin' ter do ther trick with only you ter handle an' I'm gamblin' that this is ther way he planned ter work: You'n him would be alone in ther cab. You'd be thinkin' what a fine play you'd made an' he'd be a thinkin' what an easy game he'd run up against.

"You plotted ter take him here while he was bettin' that you'd be at ther police station in a few minutes. Am I puttin' you wise, old girl? Don't yer see that he was playin' ter get yer into ther cab an' then put ther bracelets on yer?"

"Then you think he was onto my game all the time, do you?"

"Dead sure. Nicholas is a foxy mark an' you never fooled him a little bit."

"Well, he's trapped anyhow, so what does it matter?" said Meg, indifferently.

"Yes, he's in ther soup up to his neck, but you've ter thank Dick Benny for that."

The young sport's eyes roved about the room. When they fell on an iron bar standing in a corner he arose to his feet. The girl watched him curiously.

With the bar in his hand he returned to the bed.

"I'm goin' ter propose somethin'," he said. "Let's remove ther gag from Nicky's mouth an' hear what he's gotter spiel. If he raises his voice ter shout for help I'll be ready to smash in his skull. What do yer say?"

"I'm agreeable."

The gag was removed and Nick Carter spoke in a hoarse voice:

"I have listened to your conversation," he said, "and I will have to confess that I have made a mistake. I had not counted on the appearance of your friend. By the way, Miss Meg, where did you get your education? You do not speak like the ordinary, illiterate servant girl."

The maid laughed. "Fooled to the limit, weren't you. I am no servant girl. I have been an actress and I have been playing a part with you ever since our meeting in Mrs. Smithers' house."

"I suspected as much," returned Nick, composedly. "You are Smithers' wife, are you not?"

The girl blushed. "No, I am not," she replied, hotly. "I am his cousin and when he slipped out of the asylum and asked my help in getting even upon people who had injured him, I cheerfully gave it."

"And this young sport here? Where did you make his acquaintance?"

Dick Benny answered for her. "We met at a dance at Coney Island a few months ago. I liked ther fit of her tailor-made an' she liked my con talk."

"It wasn't con talk," said the girl, indignantly. "What do you say that, for?"

"Jest ter be entertainin'," was the smiling reply. "Well, we took a likin' ter each other an' I promised if ever I hiked ter Boston, ter look her up."

"You're a gun," commented Nick, "but I don't remember your face."

"I remember yours, though," chuckled Benny. "I haven't been long on the turf, but I played short-stop for ther Sound gang once."

"The time the gang did up the patrolman in Great Jones street?"

"I am not confessin' anythin'," said Benny, shortly.

"You don't have to. I know you now. One member of that gang, a young fellow, escaped. It was not my case or I might have found you."

"Well, you've found me now, but I don't think ther findin' will do you any good. What do you think about it?"

Dick Benny grinned and then winked at Meg.

"Miss Alverson an' me," he went on, presently, "are of one mind in this racket. You are It."

Nick Carter lowered his eyes.

Nothing was said for some time. The detective broke the silence.

"As I have put my foot in it and have no chance of escape, will you," addressing Meg Alverson, "answer one or two questions?"

"All you want," was the serene reply. "Fire away."

"Where is Chick?"

"He ought to be in this house. I left him here a few hours ago."

"Then I would suggest," put in Benny, quickly, "that you get a move on an' see if he is fixed so he can't butt in an' queer the game."

The girl got to her feet and moved toward the corridor. At the door the voice of Benny caused her to stop.

"Hold on," the young sport said, "I'll go with you."

After having replaced the gag in the detective's mouth he went with the girl.

Soon the sounds of a struggle followed by muffled cries reached the ears of the bound detective. But he manifested no alarm. On the contrary a smile played about the corners of his lips.

Five minutes elapsed and Dick Benny re-entered the room. He was followed by Chick, on whose face was a sheepish expression.

Nick Carter's bonds were cut and the gag was taken from his mouth. Seizing he put out his hand and it was heartily grasped by the young sport.

"Patsy, my boy," said the great detective, with an earnestness that brought a warm blush to the cheeks of the young assistant, "you have surpassed yourself. I knew when I counterfeited that fit that I could count on you, but I never imagined that you would play the game as well as you did."

"I was favored by luck, Nick," responded Patsy. "I was looking for you, having just come from headquarters and when I spotted Meg, who had been fooled by the lemon dope I gave her one day at Coney Island, I saw that my hand was a good one."

The great detective then turned to Chick. "Patsy has one on you," he said with a smile," but you may be able to even up matters before we get through with this affair. How did you happen to get caught out?"

"By allowing myself to be taken in by that young woman who was in this room a few minutes ago. My name is neither Hiram nor Reuben but Miss Meg Alverson played her game so well that she landed me in great shape. Here is the yarn: I left you, Nick, to follow her. She had been watching your quarters and it was evident that she was a Jocko Smithers spy. Now what does that slick piece of calico do but hike toward police headquarters. She must have known the chief's hours for he wasn't in when she reached the office. I heard her ask the clerk for the chief and I noted, without suspicion, the deeply disappointed look that came into her face when she learned that he was not in."

"I am beginning to appreciate the situation," said Nick. "Ninety-nine men out of a hundred would have been taken in by the tactics she adopted. But go on."

Chick, with a grateful glance at his superior, continued his story.

"When she returned to the sidewalk I spoke to her. She had got me fooled and so I up and told her that I had been following her and that I was delighted to learn that she was not the kind of woman I had previously put her up to be.

"She threw me a dazzling smile and asked my name. As I did not immediately answer, she continued: 'You must have come from Nick Carter and therefore you are his assistant. Then you will do better than the chief of police. I have important information respecting Jocko Smithers whom Mr. Carter is anxious to arrest. I know where he is at this moment. He is in bed and I hope, asleep, at a house on Richmond Street. I started out to notify Mr. Carter and have him catch the man, but after I had seen his face at the window of his room, I backed out. I was afraid that he would distrust me. He has reason to do so,' she continued, with downcast eyes, 'for he found me with Mrs. Smithers yesterday.'

"I had nothing to say and after a moment she went on; 'I don't know whether he told you or not but I was forced to stay with Mrs. Smithers. I refused, however, to become an accomplice in the criminal schemes planned by Jocko, and this morning I escaped from the house. In order to lull Jocko's suspicions, I left a note stating that I had gone out to entertain

if I could, what the officers were doing, and that I would return in the afternoon. At this hour Jocko Smithers is asleep. I know his habits and that is why I wanted the chief of police to go out with me and take the villain by surprise.'

"'Let us go there at once,' I suggested and away we started.

"We found the house and Meg unlocked the door and then whispered: 'Wait until I have made sure that he is asleep.'

"She was gone about two minutes and returned with the statement that Jocko was snoring like a trooper.'

"At that moment, Nick, my feet began to get cold. I had not doubted before, but now it struck me that I might have been gulled. The girl noticed my expression and actually smiled. 'I can guess what is in your mind,' she said. 'You are suspicious. I don't blame you. Let me suggest something. Go to the nearest telephone and call up the police station. Tell the man in charge where you are and ask for a squad of officers. We will wait just as we are until the officers come. Perhaps Jocko will stay asleep while we wait. When the reenforcements arrive the arrest can be made.'

"This spiel, Nick, settled it for me. I am ashamed to admit it, but the girl's look was so honest and earnest that doubt fled. I entered the house, was conducted to a back room and was sandbagged before I knew where I was at."

Nick Carter looked at his watch. It was a few minutes after eleven o'clock.

"Jocko will come at midnight," he said. "We must be ready for him. There is a back as well as a front entrance. Chick, it will be your duty to go out the front door, find a convenient hiding place and stay there until Jocko enters the house from the front or you have reason to believe that he has entered from the rear. Patsy, your stunt will take in the back yard and what I have said to Chick will apply to you. I will remain here."

The three detectives were standing in the middle of the room.

Nick Carter had scarcely finished his instructions when the floor gave way under their feet and they were precipitated to the cellar.

CHAPTER V.

THE CHILD OF THE JUNGLE.

Nick, Chick and Patsy had been standing upon a [illegible] trap door and immediately after it had been [illegible] to land them on the floor of the cellar it was [illegible] into place.

The fall was but seven or eight feet and neither of them was hurt. That is to say, there were no bodily hurts. But their feelings were unspeakably lacerated. To be trapped at what had seemed the dawn of victory was a circumstance calculated to excite the most violent wrath.

Chick and Patsy had something to say but it need not be repeated.

Nick Carter scowled but said nothing in the way of venting his emotions. A minute after the downfall of the three detectives the trap door was opened slightly and a rough voice said, mockingly:

"Three of a kind beaten by a king-full. I am the king and if I ain't full I'll be in that condition presently in honor of this glorious victory. Carter, this is one on you."

The great detective guessed that Jocko Smithers was speaking but he did not deign to reply.

The voice continued: "You're a fine lot of chumps. You"—a bullet fired from Patsy's pistol cut short the insulting speech. The door closed with a bang and Jocko troubled them no more from that point.

The cellar was not dark. There was a barred window on one side and there was a light of some kind outside of and close to it. The light permitted the captives to take in their surroundings.

There was no air shaft as in the house of Mrs. Smithers and there were no pipes connecting any of the upstairs rooms with the sewer.

The house was an old-fashioned one and had been built before the inauguration of sanitary improvements.

Nick believed that prior to the appearance of Jocko Smithers it had not been occupied for many years.

The barred window was examined. Through it a narrow section of yard enclosed with a high board fence could be seen.

And something else was observed by the detective. Outside and directly in front of the window and covering the wide space was large dry goods box. Upon the upper end was a lighted lantern and upon each side of the window hung from the casing, was also a lantern. The box rested against the window sill and was covered with wires all terminating underneath an object that spoke of sudden death. The object was a revolver and the hammer was raised to be sprung whenever any one of the wires should be touched.

The detective looked at the infernal contrivance for some time. Escape by means of the window, if the bars could be severed, seemed to be impossible.

"That's a one-man trap," remarked Patsy as he looked over Nick's shoulder. "The revolver can kill but one person. Who is anxious to sacrifice himself for the sake of saving the lives of two human beings? Chick, you are the piker. You haven't any friends, whereas, if I should go out I'd be missed by the [illegible]."

Chick smiled. Nick looked grave.

Presently he said: "If it came to a pinch, I know where Patsy would be." He bent an affectionate look on the young detective. Patsy blushed and turned away.

Nick remained standing by the window. Chick watched him with a smile. After a time the great de-

tective spoke soberly: "The fellow who placed that pistol on the box and fixed up those wires is a fool."

"Perhaps you're wrong, Nick," replied Chick. "Perhaps he has a bug in his brain."

"It amounts to the same thing. He is not right, mentally. I have had that idea in my head for some time. He went into the asylum a sane man. He came out of it with a crook in his thinking apparatus. I can beat that revolver game and I will do it if we are not disturbed in the next hour."

"How will you do it?" inquired Patsy.

"When the bars are out, I will show you. Get out your knives, boys, and we'll tackle the wood-work of the window frame. No need to use a file, even if we had one. We will cut away the frame and the bars will drop out."

The work was begun and in twenty minutes the bars were out and lying on the floor.

"I have heard no sound outside or above us," said Nick, when the job was finished, "and that circumstance seems to prove that what we have just done is unknown to our enemy. But we must not bank on appearances. It may be that Jocko Smithers counted on our doing the very thing that has been done and that he is now waiting for the report that shall send death to one or all of us."

"All of us?" repeated Chick, with a puzzled look.

"Yes," returned Nick, gravely. "Although I hope to beat the contrivance that fiend has placed outside, there has just come the suspicion that there is more to it than I had at first supposed. There may be something inside the box. We can't make an examination and so we must do the next best thing."

He drew his revolver and then went on: "Get to the furthest corner, both of you and stay there. Something is going to happen."

Something did happen. Nick, not in front of the open window, but at one side of it, took careful aim at the revolver on the box and then pulled the trigger.

A terrific explosion followed. It was caused, not by the revolver but by the bursting of a bomb under the box.

The shock knocked Nick Carter to the floor of the cellar although he had leaped backward on discharging his weapon.

The damage was considerable. There was a large hole in the side of the building and another in the ground to the depth of several feet.

Chick and Patsy in a corner escaped unhurt.

The great detective arose to his feet and walked unsteadily toward his assistants. "Come," he said, "we must get out of this."

"Are you all right?" asked Chick, anxiously.

"Yes. I struck the floor rather hard but lost nothing beyond a little breath."

The three detectives went out of the window and were making their way to the sidewalk when they met a policeman and a number of excited citizens.

The policeman pulled his pistol and there might have been a tragedy if Nick had not spoken quickly.

A few words caused the officer to change his manner. He drove the crowd to the sidewalk, informed the inquisitive that no one had been hurt and then rejoining Nick, asked if the house was occupied.

The detective concluded to explain. He did not tell all the story but he said enough to make the policeman whistle.

"I saw a man and a woman come from this direction and go down toward the water about fifteen minutes ago. They were in a hurry and the woman looked back several times."

"Did you follow them?" questioned Nick, eagerly.

"Yes. Their actions were suspicious and I made up my mind to stop and question them. But I never got the opportunity. They disappeared in the vicinity of a showman's tent, on a vacant lot between two wholesale houses."

"Any lights in or about the tent?"

"No. I would have aroused the proprietor who sleeps in the tent if a row up the street had not called me away. I had no sooner settled the disturbance than the explosion occurred."

Nick, with a strange idea in his mind, whispered instructions to Chick and Patsy and then said to the policeman: "We might as well look through the house. I believe the persons you saw were the man and woman who tried to knock out my assistants and myself, but it will be well to make sure that they are not still in the house."

Chick and Patsy were hurrying away from the building when Nick and the policeman entered it.

They found no one and shortly afterward Nick was near the wharves talking with Chick.

"I have seen nothing," was the assistant's report. "Jocko may have crawled under the tent and may be inside at this moment. Certain it is that no one has come out of it."

"Where is Patsy?"

"On watch. He has a good position, and will stay there until you call him off."

"Let him keep watch until daylight and then you may relieve him. I will take your place at eight o'clock."

Nick left the place and went to bed. He was up at daybreak and at eight o'clock found Chick.

"They are stirring inside the tent," Chick said. "Now is the time to investigate."

"Correct. I'll go in and you remain out here."

Nick, without warning, pulled aside the flap at the door and entered the canvas enclosure.

A tall, heavily bearded man was sitting on a box lacing his shoes. He started when he saw the detective and a curious expression appeared on the face of Nick Carter as he looked at the man.

"I hope you will pardon me," Nick said apologetically, "for coming in upon you in such abrupt, impolite manner, but the case on which I am engaged is so peculiar that I did not dare to take any other course."

The black-bearded man gazed at the smooth-voiced

speaker in bewilderment. He nervously stroked his beard and waited for a further communication.

Nick, looking about him, observed that the tent had two compartments. The one he was in was probably used for the audience room; the other, concealed from view by large portieres must be the show department.

"Before I say anything more, will you permit me to look into the other room," he asked.

The man, who was the proprietor, as Nick had inferred, readily assented. He was not at his ease and yet there was no fear in his eyes.

The portieres were parted and the detective saw a small stage and two animal cages. In one of these cages was an ourang-outang of the largest size. The other contained a performing pig.

Nick's eyes were glued on the big monkey. "Where did you pick him up?" he inquired.

"He was captured in Sumatra," answered the man, gruffly.

"Does he get loose?"

"Yes."

Nick looked behind the cage and the ourang-outang hoarsely chittered.

The under part of the stage, a cheap board affair, was veiled by strips of canvas. The detective raised one of the strips and looked under the boards. Nothing there.

"What are you looking for?" asked the proprietor. He was calm now and there was a smile on his face.

"For an insane man," said Nick, quietly.

The proprietor continued to smile. The detective smiled back.

The two men gazed at each other, the one with superiority and confidence, the other with a feeling that his position was insecure.

They returned to the audience room and sat down. "Well," said the proprietor, "out with it. You are Nick Carter and you are after somebody. Who is the man and how can I assist you?"

"You can assist me by telling me all you know about Jocko Smithers."

The black-bearded man compressed his lips. Next he lowered his eyes. Nick regarded him intently.

"How do you know that I am acquainted with this fellow, Smithers?" the man asked.

"By information given me by a friend of yours."

"A friend?" lifting his head, quickly and staring hard at the detective. "Who friend?"

"Remove that unbecoming disguise, Mr. Chetwood Holley, and I will tell you," replied Nick, sharply.

With a movement of exasperation Holley jerked the beard from his face. "There," he said, angrily. "You have run me down. I hope you are satisfied."

Nick waited a moment before he spoke. He knew that the young fellow would cool off quickly. His smile at last brought an answering smile from Helen Forsyth's lover.

"I had hoped to run this case myself," he remarked with just a trace of bitterness. "I wanted to capture that fiend, Jocko, with my own hand. I have been anxious to obtain evidence showing his guilt and my innocence. But you have come into the case and here we are tangled up in it just when I was congratulating myself that I had laid the wire for catching the murderer."

"What have you done, Mr. Holley?" asked Nick, politely.

"I haven't located him but I have set a trap for him and I am waiting patiently for him to fall into it. I know the man and I believed the trap will fetch him."

"I hope it will," replied Nick, earnestly.

Chetwood Holley looked his surprise. Presently he said with a frankness and geniality that had not marked his previous utterances: "I must ask your pardon for having resented your intrusion. I knew of you but I supposed you were like the ordinary detective, wanting everything in sight and unwilling to share in the honors of capture. I see that you are white. I will convince you that I am not black. Now, I don't care a button who wins out, you or I. Maybe we can win together. Well and good. I'll tell you all I know and then you can proceed with a better understanding of the scoundrel we both desire to catch.

"He is three parts sane, one part insane. His is a most peculiar case. His early life reads like the wildest romance. He was born on the island of——"

"Sumatra," interrupted Nick, with a twinkle in his eye.

"What?"—in the greatest astonishment. "You know?"

"No, I never heard his story. But while I have been here with you I have had some new ideas put into my head. Go on. I will not again interrupt you."

Holley with a higher opinion of Nick's abilities than he had ever before entertained, went on: "I got the yarn from his sister, Mrs. Smithers. She married her cousin, William Smithers and that is why her surname was not changed when she became a wife. Jocko's father was a sailor. His ship was wrecked in the Indian Ocean and with the first mate he escaped in a boat and reached Sumatra. While waiting for another ship he met and fell in love with the daughter of an Englishman who had settled on the island. She induced him to give up a seafaring life. He married, settled down and was a good husband and father. Two children blessed his union with the Englishwoman.

"The younger was Jocko, but that was not the name he received at christening. Jocko was a nick-name, given to him after a certain monkey you know. His mother had a sister, married two years before, whose occupation was the snaring of wild animals for an European firm. One day he brought to the village where he and the Smithers family lived an immense ourang-outang. The Smithers' boy was then about a year old. He was allowed to sit in front of the cage that contained the big beast and it was soon observed that

the orang-outang was pleased with the baby's appearance.

"One night the beast broke out of his cage, entered the open door of the house that sheltered Mr. and Mrs. Smithers and lifting the sleeping babe from the cot where it reposed bore it off to the jungle.

"The loss was not discovered until near morning and pursuit was at once undertaken. It was not until two months afterward that the boy was rescued. He had been pretty roughly treated, but the protection of the abductor had been sufficient to prevent serious harm at the hands of the other orang-outangs.

"He was too young to talk and the truth could only be guessed at. His playmates nicknamed him Jocko and soon his parents began to call him by the same name. As he grew up he evinced a passionate desire for the life of a hunter and when he was twelve years old he was found in a jungle one day nursing a wounded monkey and in the trees close by other monkeys could be seen looking on. When his father attempted to take him away from the spot he fought like a tiger.

"The next year Mr. Smithers died and soon after his widow accompanied her sister to the United States. They settled in Boston and Jocko grew to manhood among the lower classes. His tastes were vicious and several times he was arrested for petty thefts. Before he was of age his mother died and his sister, who had been a waitress in a restaurant, and was now the wife of her cousin, the proprietor, took him to her home and became his confederate in many of his criminal ventures. She is as lacking, morally, as he is.

"She knew his insane penchant for simian companionship and did her best to keep his mind from the subject. But she did not succeed. Once he disappeared and was found months afterward working as assistant in a menagerie attached to a traveling circus.

"During the year prior to his arrest for the Perron burglary he gave his sister no trouble on the monkey score. He attended strictly to criminal business and at last was caught and, simulating insanity, an easy thing for him to do, was sent to an asylum.

"While he was in confinement, his sister's husband died and the woman sold the restaurant and opened a lodging house. I saw her once at her house. She sent a note, asking me to call. I owned a shack and a piece of garden ground beyond Cambridge and she wanted to rent it. I did not give her a decided answer for I wished to consider the matter. But I was civil enough and in the hope, perhaps that I would conclude to make the lease she told me that Jocko would soon be free and that I had better look out for myself for he had threatened to do me injury. My father, who died a few years ago, was on the jury that convicted Smithers and the villain had sworn to punish me for what my father did."

"The fact that you are now in hiding shows that he did try to punish you," said Nick.

"Yes. He attempted to make it appear that I killed Thomas Perron. He wrote the note that sent me to Perron's store on the night of the murder. I knew I had been deceived when I got to the place and saw the dead body of Helen's father. I realized, also, that I was enmeshed in a network of circumstantial evidence and that if I should be arrested my chances of proving my innocence would be slim. Therefore I resolved to go into hiding and play detective. I have explained all to Helen who is now my enthusiastic ally and my first important move to ensnare Jocko Smithers was made when I purchased this show outfit in Worcester three days ago.

"I bought it because it contained an orang-outang and I am located here in Boston for the purpose of using the beast as a bait to catch the murderer. And it will catch him. He'll hear of the show, he'll come here and with or without disguise I will know him and can arrest him."

"Have you secured any evidence that points to him as the murderer?"

"I have nothing but the note that lured me to the store. It will be easy to procure specimens of his writing at the asylum. I am positive that a comparison will prove that he was the writer."

"I have picked up some points," said the great detective, "and if we can catch the smart young woman who is now assisting him, I believe we can make out a strong case against him. By the way, did you hear any one prowling around the tent last night?"

"No. But I slept soundly."

Nick told Holley what he had done and what had occurred at the house on Richmond Street. The young man was both astonished and excited. In his opinion, the murderer was not far away. "Perhaps," she said, "he will come to the show this afternoon."

Nick shook his head. "I don't think so. The sane part of him will rule to-day. Besides he has Meg Alverson with him and she will persuade him to keep in hinding while the excitement over last night's work is on."

"You may be right," replied Holley, "but I'll be prepared for him all the same."

Nick, after a bit, went out to talk with Chick. He was gone a few minutes and returned to the tent with the information that Chick had left his post of waiting and was nowhere to be seen.

"Of course he saw somebody, the woman, probably, and is now shadowing her. I am sorry that I was not out there when the quarry appeared for I would have taken up the chase and sent Chick to bed. He was up all night and there is no telling when he will come in to make his report."

The detective considered the case a moment and then continued: "I am going out to see another assistant of mine. If Chick should come in here while I am away tell him to stay until I arrive."

"I am going out to breakfast shortly," said Holley. "I am waiting for my handy man. He assists me and looks after the animals."

"Who is he?"

"A fellow I picked up in Worcester. He is an old

hand at the business; was connected for years with Benham's big circus."

"In whose circus was Jocko Smithers employed at the time he was a runaway from home?"

Holley thought a moment. "By George," he exclaimed, "it was Benham's. You don't think," he paused and looked inquiringly at the detective. Nick nodded. "It is a suspicious circumstance," he said. "You have a telephone, I observe. Stay here half an hour. That will give me time to get to Patsy's place of lodging. Here is the address," handing Holley a card. "Phone me whether Chick shows up or not. Give me the lay of the land."

Holley promised and Nick left.

Five minutes after his departure the handy man arrived. He was short, stocky, pockmarked and pig-eyed. A flat nose was stuck over a thick upper lip and a lump on his under lip near the end added to his repulsive appearance. An habitual scowl rested on his face and he slouched as he walked and acted at all times as if he were under suspicion.

Holley had found him a capable man and had given no thought to his appearance and manner. But now the young man looked at the fellow with an interest in which dark suspicion was blended.

"Pete," said he, with an assumption of affability, "I wish you would run over to Sampson's store and get a pint bottle of olive oil. I want to feed it to Bruno, the 'rang-ou'."

Peter Barlow received the money for the purchase and went out. Holley knew from experience that it would take Barlow a full half hour to go to the store and return.

At the time agreed upon, Chick not having appeared, he telephoned to Nick Carter.

He was about to turn away from the telephone when a sandbag struck him and he fell over and lay still.

The assailant was tall and thin and his face was cadaverous. Beside him stood Peter Barlow.

"That was a knockout blow, Jocko," Barlow said. "He's croaked."

"No," replied the arch-villain, "the mucker's got life in him. I don't want to kill him. He's booked for hoggin'."

CHAPTER VI.

A SAVAGE ASSAULT.

Jocko Smithers walked to the door, looked out and after fastening the flap so that entrance could not be affected, without the use of force, sat down by the motionless form of Chetwood Holley and rubbed his hands in malevolent glee.

"Was there ever such luck," he said to his confederate. "Holley buys a show so's he could snare me and hires you, my old pal, to do the working part. I comes along here yesterday when Holley is out, sees you and gets put wise. Say, who's caught the lemon?"

"Pears to me you're forgettin' Nick Carter?" remarked Barlow.

"Not for a minute, Pete. Nick and his infant class will be my meat before night. They got out of a trap I laid for 'em last night, but they won't escape the next one."

"I believe you are crazy, Jocko," returned Barlow, in disgust. "How in the name of Moses are you goin' to lay Nick by the heels? Do you take him for a mutt? You expect him to come here this forenoon while things are quiet, I suppose. Well, if he does come a hikin' this way he'll not come inside until he knows that it is safe to do so. Nothin' doin' this afternoon, for afternoon is show time. Take another look at your hand, Jock."

The villain laughed and showed his yellow teeth. "Lots you know about my plans," he said. "Just wait an' don't get frightened. I'm runnin' this exhibition and I am going to put it through according to programme."

"Then what you've plotted to do must be done this forenoon."

"Cert. It'll all be done inside of an hour, for I'm countin' on Nick's return within fifteen minutes."

"How are you goin' to do him?"

"By putting Bruno on to him. Bruno will do whatever I tell him to do. Thunder, but this is a funny racket. Holley comes here with Bruno, who thinks more of me than of any two-legged bein' in the world. He planned to use Bruno as a bait, never knowin' what a rich bait it was. If he had known that Bruno and me slept together for three years he would have bet his chance in the hereafter that I was the same as caught. Oh, dear, oh, dear," with a series of chuckles, "to think that he was bringin' Bruno to assist me in my schemes."

Chetwood Holley opened his eyes and groaned. Jocko Smithers stopped talking and proceeded to bind and gag his victim. This operation performed he dragged the body to the other compartment and rolled it under the orang-outang's cage. The beast chittered hoarsely when it saw its former keeper and exhibited unmistakable signs of affection.

Jocko stroked the hairy head and spoke soothingly. The orang-outang chittered softly and had the spaces between the bars permitted would have lovingly embraced the man.

Ten minutes later Nick Carter approached the door of the tent. Peter Barlow was standing in front of it, and a shiver ran through him as he saw the detective.

Although plans had been laid for Nick's undoing yet the predestined wretch had such a wholesome respect for Nick's abilities that he would never breathe freely until he had become a witness of the triumph of Jocko.

The detective stopped at the door and asked: "Has your employer returned from breakfast?"

"Sure. He's inside feedin' the 'rang.'"

Nick did not say "I thought it was your business to take care of the animals," instead of speaking he turned and started to walk away.

Barlow, surprised and worried, called out, earnestly: "Hold on, mister. The prop will be out in a minute. He's expectin' some one an' maybe you're the man."

The detective, now satisfied that all was not right, turned about and came back to the tent.

He had sized up Barlow for a rascal of the lowest type and he had a shrewd suspicion that Jocko Smithers and not Chetwood Holley was engaged with the orang-outang.

"If only Chick were here," he said to himself, "the work would be easy."

"Come in and wait," said Barlow, affably.

Nick's eyes were taking in the faces of the pedestrians on the sidewalk across the street. As Barlow spoke Chick turned a corner and seeing Nick ran quickly toward him. A quick sign was given and Chick, changing his course, made for the rear of the tent.

The great detective now gave his attention to Jocko Smithers', tool.

"I will walk inside," he said.

Barlow threw aside the flap and Nick, observing that the auditorium was empty walked in and took a seat.

He suspected treachery, but Chick was on hand, and he, Nick, was on his guard.

A horse chittering from the other compartment was taken by him as a signal of danger.

He arose to his feet, with his hand on his postol, and standing so that he could have one eye on Barlow and the other on the division portieres, waited for developments.

They were quick to come. The portieres parted and Jocko Smithers and the gigantic simian stood in the opening.

The arch-villain's hands were at his side and he made no move to raise them.

Nick gazed at the sneering countenance for one brief moment, then took a step forward and his pistol hand went up.

"Come forward and throw up your hands," he commanded.

For answer the villain stepped back and as he did so the orang-outang, its little eyes scintillating with ferocity, leaped forward.

Nick's revolver cracked, the beast uttered a howl of pain and the next instant its long, powerful arms were clasped about the detective's body and its sharp, cruel teeth were sunk deep in the victim's shoulder.

Although a Sandow in strength and skill, Nick Carter found more than his match in this savage brute from the Sumatra jungles.

But with life at stake he fought with desperate courage and in spite of the agony he was suffering managed to get his fingers about the orang-outang's throat and to take a grip that made the beast utter painful, choking cries.

But the brave detective knew that he could not hold on long. His breath was leaving him and as he and the orang-outang rolled over and over on the floor, he knew that unless help came within a minute he would be a dead man.

Help did come. The report of the pistol was heard on the street and while the terrific struggle between man and beast was going on, a policeman and a dozen citizens entered the tent.

A blow from the policeman's club made the orang-outang relax his hold on the detective and more blows, followed by a couple of shots stretched the brute lifeless beside the detective.

Nick made an effort to raise but fell back with a groan.

A stimulant was administered and then the policeman telephoned for a doctor.

The detective, with returning strength, motioned to the policeman as he was returning from the phone.

"Never mind me," he said, huskily. "Look in the other room."

The officer, followed by a crowd of curious citizens, went into the room with the cages and there found Chetwood Holley. The gag was removed and the cords cut.

"What's happened?" he asked, as he was being assisted to his feet.

"Man nearly killed by a big monkey," was the answer. "Queer doin's in here? What's it all about?"

"Find a man with a thin face, color of a corpse and you'll know all about it," said Holley, sharply. "He ran out at the back not three minutes ago."

The policeman waited to hear no more and was off like a shot.

Holley went into the main room, saw the dead orang-outang, with Nick Carter sitting on a bench with torn and bloody clothing and understood what had occurred while he was lying bound and gagged under the cage.

The young man and the detective were talking when the doctor arrived.

Nick was badly wounded in the shoulder and an antiseptic treatment was imperatively demanded. The wounds were given a preliminary dressing and then the doctor, who was also a surgeon went out to procure a cab.

"Go outside, look around the tent and see if you can pick up anything," said Nick to Holley as soon as the doctor had gone. "I am worried about Chick. He was outside when I entered the tent. I can't imagine what has become of him. I relied upon his aid in arresting Smithers. His failure to appear is most surprising."

Holley went out to return in a few moments with the statement that there was no one outside and no sign of a struggle.

Nick was puzzled. The outside of the tent was in plain view of passers-by on the street and therefore it was improbable that Chick had been attacked as he was about to enter from the rear. What could have

sent him away at a most critical moment? Try as he would, the detective could not solve the riddle.

"If Chick had met Jocko Smithers when the villain left the tent, there would have been something doing. Chick would have tried to arrest the fellow and resistance would have followed. A fight would have drawn a crowd. The policeman would have seen it. Holley would have heard the noise." The detective's reflections ceased. He looked up at Helen Perron's lover and asked: "You saw Smithers go out, did you not?"

"Yes. He left by the side, ripped a hole in the canvas with his knife."

"The regular exit is at the back, is it?"

"Yes."

"Did you hear anything after Smithers went out?"

"Nothing from the outside. All the noise came from this room. First there was a pistol shot and then came the sounds of the frightful struggle that followed."

"Then there might have been a struggle outside at the time of my set-to with the orang-outang?"

"There might have been, yes, but it must have been witnessed," said Holley as a thought struck him. "Smithers, as I have said, went out on one side, the side that faces the back of this lot. Workmen in the warehouse back of the tent might have seen a struggle if any occurred and they might also have seen what way Smithers took when he left the tent."

The doctor came in and said that a cab was at the door.

"I am not ready to go," said Nick, firmly. "The cab will have to wait for half an hour."

The doctor objected to the delay but after the detective had explained the situation he consented to wait.

Holley left in accordance with instructions given by Nick. He was away fifteen minutes and when he reentered the tent his face was beaming with pleasure.

"It's all right," he announced. "The policeman you sent out has found Chick and you'll soon know the whole business."

Nick Carter's fine countenance shone with delight. He had feared that his faithful assistant and friend had met with serious disaster.

In a few minutes Chick and the policeman came in. There was a glum look on Chick's face and he lowered his eyes as he stepped in front of Nick.

"I have again made a fool of myself," he said. Then noticing the condition of Nick's clothing and the arm bandage, he exclaimed in deep concern: "You're hurt, Nick. That shot I heard, then, was fired at you?"

"No," responded the detective. "No bullet was fired at me."

"The big monkey got him," put in the policeman.

Chick had not yet seen the dead orang-outang as several people stood in front of it. They moved away as the officer spoke and then Chick realized what his chief had undergone. Again his head fell.

"It was all my fault," he said. "I should have shot Jocko when I had the chance."

Nick gave his assistant a warning glance and then turning to the doctor said he was ready to go.

Chick and Holley got into the cab with the great detective and in the latter's room, after proper attention had been given to the wounded shoulder, the three friends talked business.

Chick told his story with an expression of disgust.

"I knew what your signal meant, Nick, and I hiked to the rear of the tent. Looking in at the door I saw Jocko Smithers let the big monkey out of the cage. I had no idea as to his intention and so watched him until he threw aside the portieres. Then I knew what the game must be, and I was in the act of stepping inside when Jocko turned and made a dash for the side of the tent not ten feet from where I stood. At the same moment the shot rang out. I believed that you fired it and that it was meant for the orang-outang. I should have gone into the main room to assure myself that all was well with you, but the sight of that murdering villain running away put all my thoughts on him."

"I understand," said Nick." You thought I was able to take care of my end of the game, and as I had come to the tent to capture Jocko, you acted as you had reason to think I would want you to act."

"I had that feeling, certainly," replied Chick, his face brightening, "for if I had had the remotest notion that you were in deadly danger I would have let Jocko slide and gone in to your assistance."

"No need to tell me that, Chick. Now go on and finish your story."

"I didn't shine in it," said Chick, with a sour grin. "That crazy villain played an old game on me and though I tried my best to queer it, I failed and he got away.

"When he lit out from the tent he made a bee-line for the open door of the warehouse, which, as you probably noticed, is about fifty feet from the tent. I was quick on his heels and as I said, I could easily have plugged him. But it seemed to me that nothing stood in the way of his capture and I knew you would rather have him alive than dead. Alive, he might, willingly or unwillingly, furnish points that would conclusively establish his guilt and show the innocence of Mr. Holley. Dead we might never be able to prove that he killed Thomas Perron.

"Well he ran into the warehouse where were several workmen, with yours truly at his heels. And what does the slick rascal do then but turn and grab me shouting at the same time that I was a murderer who had just killed Nick Carter. The workmen bravely came to his assistance and though I said that I was a detective and that he was the murderer, none of the men believed me. There were over half a dozen of them, big husky fellows who knew how to fight and who gave me the tussel of my life. I knocked down three of them and might have made it exceedingly

interesting for the others if I hadn't been tripped up and in a moment found the whole outfit on top of me.

"About that time I concluded to play the passive act. I allowed the men to yank me to my feet and then I looked around for a sight of Mr. Jocko. Of course he was nowhere to be seen. When the workmen sailed into me he sailed out.

"It took some time to make the men believe that they had been fooled. Final and conclusive proof of my statement was furnished by the policeman you sent out to look for Jocko."

Soon after Chick had finished his story, Patsy came in. He had been detailed to visit the asylum from whence Jocko Smithers had escaped, for the purpose of obtaining specimens of the villain's handwriting.

"Gee," he said when the stories of Nick, Holley and Chick had been retold, "but you fellows have been having a high old time. Wish I had been there when the monk came in. I know the nature of monks. When they get ugly all you wants to do is to whistle."

Nick Carter smiled. "I hadn't time to pucker my mouth, Patsy. The 'rang came on like a streak of greased lightning. By the way," he added, "I wish you would go to the newspaper offices, Chick, and try to have suppressed the fact that the orang-outang was killed. I have a reason for desiring Jocko Smithers to think that the animal is still alive."

After Chick's departure Nick asked Patsy how he had succeeded.

"I got the writing all right," was the answer. "He left behind a book where you'll find a lot of scribbling."

The book, a small pocket affair, was handed to Nick who turned over the leaves with the greatest of interest.

The detective compared the writing with that on the envelope directed to Thomas Perron and saw points of similarity sufficient to show that the writer of each was the same person. He next compared Smithers' writing with that of the note that had sent Chetwood Holley to Perron's store on the evening of the murder. The note exhibited a clumsy attempt at disguise, and Nick knew that an expert at first sight, would say the man who wrote in the book indited the note to Holley.

"A little more evidence and we will have a case against Smithers," said the detective. "At present we can do nothing. A short wait will do no harm. It will take a week to get me ready for business. In the meantime some preparatory work can be done. The papers to-night will say that the orang-outang was severely but not fatally hurt. That statement will offset the report made by the people who were in the tent when Bruno was clubbed and shot by the policeman and it will inform the man we are after that opportunity for again seeing his pet will soon be afforded."

"Do you think he will show himself at the tent after his experiences of yesterday?" asked Holley. "I don't believe he will do so."

"Correct. He will not pay a second visit to the tent while it remains in Boston. It must be moved. My suggestion is that you advertise the show as for sale. Not in the newspapers, but by means of a painted placard on the outside of the tent. State that no more performances will be given owing to the illness of Bruno, the orang-outang and your desire to give up the business?"

Holley puckered his brows. "I don't get your idea," he said. "If I sell, how will the sale assist you in your campaign against Smithers?"

"I'll explain," replied Nick, a slight smile flickering about his lips. "You sell out to me. As proprietor I will pull up stakes and start for the country. My first stopping place will be Malden."

"Smithers will know you," objected Holley.

"I think not. If you will deliver that dead 'rang to Chick, some time after dark this evening, the scheme can be arranged."

A glimmer of the truth penetrated Holley's brain. "You don't mean," he began when the great detective interrupted him.

"Yes, I do, my young friend. Chick, disguised, will be the ostensible proprietor of the show, Patsy will be the handy man and I—I will be the stellar attraction, the gigantic orang-outang from the wilds of Sumatra."

CHAPTER VII.

NICK LAYS HIS WIRES.

Each of the evening papers contained a graphic account of the sensational occurrences in the show tent owned by Fleetwood Ferringham, the name Holley had adopted. The statement was made that the vicious orang-outang had been clubbed and shot and left for dead, but that an hour after the savage attack on Nick Carter, the celebrated detective, the brute had exhibited signs of life and the attending surgeon had announced that the wounds were not fatal and that Bruno would recover.

After Chetwood Holley had left Nick's room to return to the tent Chick explained why he had deserted his post of waiting outside the tent when Nick went into it to have his talk with the proprietor.

"I saw the woman, Meg Alverson, across the street. She was looking at the tent and did not seem to have noticed me. As she turned a corner I determined to follow her. I knew that by doing so I would be disobeying orders but the matter seemed to me to be urgent, for I feared she might have seen and recognized you, Nick, when you went into the tent, and that her departure might mean that she was on her way to notify Jocko.

"I followed her for half a dozen blocks and I believe I would have lost her if a street blockade, caused by a collision between two motor cars, had not interfered with my game. When I got past the ob-

struction the woman was nowhere to be seen. I asked questions of scores of people but no one of them had noticed her. Their eyes had been fixed on the motor cars."

"We have not seen the last of Meg," said Nick. "If she sticks to Jocko she is likely to give us trouble."

"If she sticks to him? Is there any doubt on that point?"

"In my opinion there is," Nick replied. "Meg Alverson is not likely to become sentimental over a crazy man. She is selfish and will look out for number one. She has been Jocko Smithers' accomplice from motives of self-interest. Up to the date of the 'rang episode he acted in a cunning, measurably sane manner. But his simian play must have opened Meg's eyes to the danger she will run by a further association with him. I don't for a moment believe she intends to reform, but I do believe that before many days she will give him the shake. Perhaps she may conclude to square herself with the police by coming forward and telling all she knows about Jocko's criminal doings in Boston."

"I wouldn't trust her as far as I can sling a cat," said Chick with positiveness.

"I would trust her to look out for herself," returned Nick. "She is a very interesting piece of goods and I should very much like to see her again and soon."

The great detective saw her sooner than he had expected. She came to his room next day when Nick was alone and her manner and words indicated that the detective had correctly foretold her course of conduct.

Patsy accompanied her, for Nick, appreciating the danger that every day menaced him while his vindictive enemy was at large, had placed Patsy on guard at the lower door.

The woman was stylishly attired and met Nick's look with an easy smile.

"I have hauled down the black flag," she began, "and this time I will play no trick."

"I am pleased to hear that statement," said Nick, politely. He motioned to a seat and taking it, she went on: "May I speak to you in private?"

Patsy, behind her, shook his head.

"I will prove to you that I am unarmed," she continued before Nick could speak and the proof was forthcoming.

Patsy came forward and placed in Nick's hand a revolver. "I have another," he said.

"And I have one under my pillow. Take it back, Patsy."

"No, let it remain," spoke Meg Alverson, without a trace of disappointment or annoyance. "Provide him with an arsenal, I don't care."

Patsy withdrew from the room. The woman showed relief when the young detective had gone.

"Your man is all right, of course," she said, apologetically, "but what I have to say must be for your ears alone."

"Does your visit mean that you have shaken Jocko?" asked the detective.

"Yes, he's crazy."

"Didn't you know it a week ago?"

"No. I thought he was queer, but it never occurred to me that he would get worse, get so bad as to make the break he did at the show tent."

"He told you about it, did he?"

"Sure, and he acted like a madman, said he would have that orang-outang if he had to kill all Boston to get it."

This statement pleased Nick immensely. Meg Alverson observed his expression of deep satisfaction and wondered at it.

"He made me so disgusted with his crazy spiel that I resolved then and there to shake him. Why, he even said that if he got hold of that big beast he intended to sail for Sumatra and live like a monkey."

She paused, and rising, began nervously to pace the floor. Nick watching her closely, believed that she was not acting. She was evidently in earnest and for the moment was to be trusted.

"You have something more to say," he remarked as she resumed her seat. "You have a proposition to make. You are aware that you have harbored a murderer, have in fact become an accessory after the act, and I presume it is your desire to save yourself from prosecution by giving information that will not only fasten the crime upon Jocko but will also lead to his arrest. Am I right?"

"Yes," she replied, firmly. "He shan't by his crazy actions put me in a hole, not if I know myself."

"I have a pretty strong case against him," said Nick, "but I am shy a point or two. Can you furnish one?"

"I can give you one point and that I think ought to settle him. Perron was killed and the body was robbed. A watch was taken. Jocko saw it, wanted it—he hadn't one of his own—and it has never left his person. He carries it in the inner pocket of his waistcoat."

"That will do," said the detective, quickly. "If he is caught and the watch is on him, he'll hang as sure as there is justice in Massachusetts."

"I have another piece of information to give," continued Meg Alverson. "You will find Jocko at a house on Seneca Street, near the Broadway bridge." The number was given and Nick made a note of it.

Patsy was then called in and asked to phone the police station.

"You will have to submit to arrest," explained Nick, gravely, "but I can assure you that the State will deal generously with you."

The woman's face paled slightly, but she uttered no word of protest. She had come to Nick's room, understanding perfectly what would probably result from her confession.

An officer soon came and took her away and an hour after her departure the chief of police with Chick and Patsy went to the house on Seneca street.

The murderer was not there. He had engaged a room the day before and half an hour prior to the arrival of the officers had left with the statement that he was going out of town.

An endeavor to trace him was made but without result.

When Nick Carter was informed of the flitting, he said: "Jocko mistrusted Meg Alverson; perhaps in disguise he followed and saw her enter this building. Divining the intention of her visit to me he at once prepared to outwit the officers. But he will not leave the State. I have the faith to believe that I will get him yet."

Four days after the arrest of Meg Alverson the great detective was on his feet and ready for the next move in the game.

The tent show had been advertised for sale as Nick had advised and there had been several applications. Instructed by Nick, Holley had refused them all and on the day of the detective's recovery the placard announced that the show had been sold.

Three days later the tent was pitched in the city of Malden.

The proprietor was a finely built man with a fierce red mustache and a voice like a foghorn. His assistant, who had charge of the animals, was a freckled-faced German, who was the butt of the small boys who congregated about the tent during forenoons when the show was not on. The German's habit was to sit on the ground back of the tent and puff lazily at a big meerschaum pipe.

This position was close to the rear opening and within a few feet of the cage that held the main attraction of the show, the savage orang-outang that had tried to kill Nick Carter. The evil reputation of the beast had been an advertisement that had had the effect of filling the audience room at every performance.

"Poys," said the German on the forenoon of the third day of the show, "I vands to dell you somedings. Don't pring no more of dose beanuds for dot pig monkey, alretty. He haf had so many of dose beanuds dot his skummick iss so hard dot you vould break your sgulls if you go bombing your hets py it. Dot monkey aind no cabridges, I dond dink, vot? Alretty he eat so much dot he veel like he vos going to explode und plow eferypody indo smithereens. Yaw, dot so? Dond do id. Dot monkey got some vorkin', you might nod know dot."

The German, who was Patsy, was speaking on business lines. The orang-outang, exhibited in the big cage, had eaten so many peanuts that it was threatened with physical collapse. In endeavoring to imitate the entertainment of the genuine human the cage counterfeit had overdone the thing.

"Does vos such a ding as gedding overcharged mit monkey-goodies, you been dot? You dink dot monkey got a gave behint his mout und dot he gan stow away ein den of dose beanuds? Dot iss nod so. Pring him some of dot molissus kindy, he likes dot und it vill maig him vell again, aind id?"

A savage chittering from the cage inside followed Patsy's speech. The disguised detective outside smiled. If he could have seen the orang-outang he would have smiled the more. The brute's fists were clinched and the right one was being shaken menacingly in the direction of the handy man.

The ostensible manager of the show did not sleep in the tent at night. He had a room in a lodging house across the street. The task of guarding the animals devolved upon Patsy. He slept with one eye open in the compartment which contained the cages.

It was expected that Jocko Smithers would attempt to steal the orang-outang and that the attempt would be made at night.

As it was against the probabilities that he would operate alone, Nick Carter, after considering the matter, believed that the confederate would be Peter Barlow.

The former handy man of the show had cut a cowardly figure in the scene that had resulted in the temporary defeat of the great detective. He had taken to his heels at the moment of the orang-outang's murderous assault, but it was probable that he had afterward met Jocko and that they had come to some understanding regarding the future operations of the murderer of Thomas Perron.

But the days passed and nothing happened.

A week after the opening of the show in Malden, a tall man with stooping shoulders, a long-tailed, ill-fitting black coat, a hook nose and long, straggling gray whiskers, was an interested spectator at the afternoon performance.

At five o'clock the audience dispersed. The Jew walked down the street, turned and observing the handy man standing at the back of the tent, crossed over and spoke to him.

Patsy, with a dim suspicion of the purpose of the oncomer, looked up stolidly when the Jew addressed him.

"Goot pizness you vos in, mein frent."

"Yaw, I god no gick gomin' mit ut."

"Fery nicsh bay vor der mongey geeper, eh? Very nicsh. How mooch?"

"Zwei pones a tay."

The Jew looked around, saw that no one was within hearing and then lowering his head, whispered: "It vos vorth more as dwice as mooch. Zwei tollar! Vos der efer such roppers!"

Patsy called up an expression of angry resentment.

"Vots der madder mit you, alretty? I peen satisfied und dot settles id. You mist ny pizness und I'll mint yours."

"How vould you lige to make a hoonderd tollars?" whispered the Jew, without exhibiting offence at the counterfeit German's words.

"Dot's a horse mit nudder golor, vot? Und how I maigs me dot money?"

"I coom here to-night, eight of der glock, den I vill explain."

At this moment the manager with the fog-horn voice walked up to the pair. As he caught Patsy's eye he shook his head, slightly.

The Jew, with a cringing bow, moved away.

"What did that old guy want?" asked the manager in a loud tone.

"He vas indersded in der show und vas dalking apouid id," replied the handy man.

The Jew heard this conversation and saw the manager leave the German and go to the front of the tent. Then he pursued his way with a smile of satisfaction on his face.

He walked slowly and never once looked behind him. Had he done so he might not have suspected that he was being followed for the tall, well-dressed young man a block in his rear, would hardly have been taken for a shadower. And the young man bore no resemblance to the manager of the show. And yet they were one and the same. Two minutes had sufficed for a change of disguise.

The Jew finally disappeared through the door of a small cottage in the outskirts of the city.

Half an hour went by and then a woman emerged from the house.

Across the street from it she passed the shadower, who had his back turned toward her and was talking to a cabman.

The young man gave her a sharp glance over his shoulder and when she had gone from sight he crossed the street and walking up to the door of the cottage pressed the button and was soon face to face with a short, stout, middle-aged woman, with an honest face and an engaging manner.

Asked if she had rooms to let she said that she had never had but one and that was now vacant, the lady who had occupied it for two nights having given it up not ten minutes before.

The young man frowned. "I have let her escape," he said to himself. "Confound it, I might have guessed that she would try to trick anyone who attempted to run her down."

What he said to the woman before him was this: "It was because the—er—lady you speak of was staying here that I desired to engage a room."

"Are you an actor?" asked the woman, curiously.

"Er—yes, I am somewhat in that line. The lady, of course you know, is an actress." This was a guess shot, but it hit the mark.

"Yes, she told me she was an actress and had played men's parts. She came down here to do some practical rehearsing."

"Did she come alone?"

"Yes."

"And has had no visitors?"

"No, no one called to see her."

The young man left the cottage in an ill humor. His walk terminated at the tent. Stopping before Patsy he said: "I have missed it. It really doesn't matter, according to Nick's idea of the situation, but I ought to have located her."

"Located her, Chick? What do you mean? You went off chasing a Hebrew. Where does the woman come in?"

Chick told his story and Patsy whistled.

"So it was Mrs. Smithers who gave me that con talk about the hundred dollars. She must have escaped from the Boston jail."

"So she did. The item was in the papers this evening. I was reading about the escape when you were starting in with your conversation with the bogus Jew."

"And you recognized her when you came up?"

"Sure and I would have nabbed her if I hadn't thought her arrest then would spoil the game we have rigged up against Jocko."

"Let's go and tell Nick about it."

They went into the tent and found Nick, with his monkey garb off, resting upon a pile of blankets which served for Patsy's bed at night.

He heard Chick's story with an unmoved face.

"It will work out all right," he said. "Mrs. Smithers, as the Jew, will come to see Patsy to-night and try to bribe him to help steal the orang-outang. Patsy will hang back at first but when the bribe is increased to two hundred dollars he will fall down and then the arrangements for the theft will be made."

"The job will be worked to-night, of course," said Chick.

"I think so," replied Nick. "My idea is that Jocko won't appear to take part in the stealing, but he will not be far away. We must have Holley posted and at once."

Patsy went out and found Holley. He was in an upstairs room in a building across the street and it had been his duty ever since his arrival in town to watch the people who came in and out of the tent. At night he took a position downstairs in the hallway.

Eight o'clock came and with it the false Jew.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SUCCESS OF THE RUSE.

The evening exhibition opened at seven-thirty and closed at nine. While the show was going on Patsy had nothing to do. Therefore, so the false Jew thought, the handy man could keep his appointment without running the risk of being suddenly called away.

As Nick Carter had conjectured the queen of Jocko Smithers offered Patsy one hundred dollars if he would permit the orang-outang to be stolen. In the character of the German, Patsy did not snap at the bribe. He hemmed and hawed and finally said: "I

peen an honest man for fere und swansy years, und I nefer oxpected dot I vould zell meinself for less dan zwei hoonderd tollars."

The pseudo Jew rubbed his hands in gleeful satisfaction.

After trying to get Patsy to accept one hundred and fifty dollars he submitted to the handy man's terms.

The arrangements were then made. At midnight the Jew was to come to the rear of the tent with a covered wagon drawn by two horses. He would bring an assistant and the cage with the orang-outang would be coveyed to the wagon. If a policeman should come along while the work was in progress the handy man was to inform him that the show had been sold and that the new proprietor had determined to remove the animals that night in order that everything might be ready for the opening in the town of Glenwood.

One hundred dollars was paid in advance. The Jew promised to pay the other hundred when the trick should have been accomplished.

After the performance Nick, Chick, Patsy and Holley met and laid their plans.

"It is my opinion," said Nick, "that the wagon will be driven by Peter Barlow. Jocko Smithers is taking no chances. He wants the big monkey but as long as he has assistants he will let them do the dangerous part of the work. He will probably meet the wagon a mile or so out of town. I hope I have sized up the affair correctly. It will make our work easier."

"It appears to me," said Holley, "that it will make your work harder. There you will be, one man against two desperate scoundrels and one terrible woman. Where do we come in?"

Nick laughed. "You have not heard all the plan," he replied. "You will have your hands full in entertaining Mrs. Smithers."

He then quickly outlined his scheme. Holley's face cleared as he listened and he was loud in commendation of it when the detective finished speaking.

At midnight when all was still about the tent a covered wagon was driven to the back door. The driver was Peter Barlow and on the seat beside him sat Mrs. Smithers in the disguise of the Jew.

As she reached the ground Patsy came out of the tent. He stepped to her side and whispered in her ear: "I haf trugged der monk so dere won't pe any noises to disturp dem boliecmans, alretty."

"Goot, fery goot," the false Jew replied. "You haf a great het, mein frent."

"Come in und see if id vos all righd," continued Patsy. "Den ve can gall de udder mans."

Mrs. Smithers consented. Completely gulled by the handy man's acting and having no suspicion that Nick Carter had any interest in the show, she followed her guide into the tent.

It was dark inside and no sooner had she stepped through the door than a heavy blanket was thrown over her head and she was lifted in Chick's strong arms and carried to the front compartment.

Quick and forcible means were taken to prevent her from crying out and while the operation of effectually subduing her was in progress Patsy went out to the wagon and informed Barlow that his services were now required inside.

He received the same kind of dose that had been administered to Mrs. Smithers. Before a gag was inserted in his mouth he was influenced by the close proximity of the muzzle of a pistol to say that the wagon was to be driven toward Boston.

The fellow had come to the tent wearing a long heavy overcoat and a fur cap. As the night was cold he had turned up the collar so that it concealed the lower part of his face.

"Patsy," said Nick, "you will have to play Barlow. Pull the cap down over your eyes and sink the rest of your face in the collar and in the dark you'll past muster. You won't have to do any talking for we'll jump Mr. Jocko before he knows where he is at."

According to other arrangements, Chick was to assume the role of the Jew and Holley was to stay behind in the tent and guard the prisoners.

There was no delay in carrying out the plan that Nick had devised. He got into the cage and the orang-outang was conveyed to the wagon. A policeman came up just as the driver was about to start the horses and on being told that the show was to be moved to another town went away satisfied.

Patsy was in high spirits and would have given utterance to his feelings if Nick had not instructed them that nothing must be said by any one of the little surprise party while on the journey.

The young detective would have put an entirely different face on the matter had he known that in the boot of the wagon, within kicking distance was huddled the murderer of Thomas Perron.

Jocko Smithers had intended, as Nick Carter had divined, to meet the wagon out of the city, but an insane desire to be near the orang-outang at the earliest possible moment had induced him, at the last moment, to change his programme.

Without informing his confederates, he stole after them and was across the street when Mrs. Smithers and Barlow went into the tent.

He did not guess that a trap had been laid and sprung and therefore when he took advantage of the departure of his confederates and hid himself in the boot of the wagon he chuckled to himself over the joke he was going to play on his sister and her pock-marked associate.

The wagon had reached the outskirts of Malden when Jocko resolved to begin the performance of his joke. He lifted the covering of the boot and pinched the leg of the man he supposed to be Peter Barlow.

Patsy uttered an "Ouch!" and then looked toward the boot.

It was now closed and there was no movement in it.

Patsy began to do some rapid thinking. Hitting upon the truth he brought his head near the leather and hoarsely whispered: "T'ink yer smart, don't yer? Fer two cents I'd kick yer block in."

Jocko Smithers chuckled and the chuckle was just what Patsy wanted to hear. He pulled up the horses and jumped to the ground.

"Come out an' show yerself, Jocko," he said.

Nick Carter heard him and so did Chick who was posted beside the cage. The time to act had come sooner than they had anticipated.

Jocko Smithers heard somebody alight from the rear end of the wagon and a strange voice say, "Where is he?" and knew that he had been tricked.

He was out of the boot in a twinkling and jumping from the side opposite to that from which the driver had descended, landed on the shoulders of Chick.

The force of the collision sent Nick Carter's brave assistant to the ground and before he could clutch and hold the murderer, Smithers was on his feet and running like a deer for an open field with a forest in the background.

Shots were sent after him and quick upon the reports Nick Carter, made up as the orang-outang was in hot pursuit. As he ran shrill chitterings left his lips.

The fugitive turned when halfway across the field, saw the false simian and at once slackened his pace. No shots were now heard. Chick and Patsy were withholding fire for fear of wounding their chief.

With a few leaps and bounds the disguised detective reached Smithers' side.

Instantly the murderer flung his arms about the hairy neck of the counterfeit denizen of the Sumatran jungles.

Hot kisses were showered on Nick's cheek and forehead.

As the arms relaxed, the detective saw his opportunity. He crouched low, chittering ecstatically the while and then as Jocko was regarding him strangely, he suddenly raised himself and, springing forward aimed a powerful blow at the murderer's head.

Smithers went down like a log, but as Nick leaped upon him to complete the victory his fingers went upward and fastened on the detective's throat. His recuperative power was wonderful and of a sudden he seemed to be endowed with the strength of a giant.

As he choked Nick, [illegible] on his body and with his arms in boa-constrictor pressure about his enemy's waist squeezed and squeezed until cries of agony burst from the murderer's lips.

As the grip on Nick's throat lessened, the terrible squeezing continued and at the right moment the detective summoned all his remarkable strength and with Jocko in the form of the murderer high in air let it drop with a thud upon the ground.

He was sitting on the motionless body of his adversary when Chick and Patsy came up.

Smithers' was sane enough after he had been bound to say to Nick: "Shoot me an' have done with it. I'm a tinhorn fool an' I want to quit right here."

"The law will deal with you," was the unsympathetic reply.

"The law—I have no use for the law. I hate the long trials. I'll plead guilty an' have the circus end in double-quick time."

"Then you admit that you killed Thomas Perron?"

"Of course I killed him and I'd kill him again if I could." He began to rave and though attempts were made to get intelligible answers to other pertinent questions, nothing came of them.

But after he had been in jail a week he was seized with a fatal illness. Before his death, when his brain was clear he made a sworn statement which as proof of guilt was placed on record.

The newspapers of Boston published sensational accounts of the capture of the murderer of Thomas Perron, and lauded to the skies the skillful work of Nick Carter and his two assistants.

Chetwood Holley appeared in public after the confession of Smithers and a month afterward was united in marriage to Helen Perron.

Meg Alverson was not prosecuted. She made friends while in jail and went out of it a member of the Salvation Army.

Nick Carter met her one day while she was peddling *War Cries* on the street.

He stopped and spoke to her.

"Is this reform business to last?" he asked.

She was at first inclined to get angry, but something in the detective's face made her change her tune.

She met his steady gaze frankly. "No," she said, "it is about played out."

"I observe that you are still an actress?"

She laughed. Receiving the remark as a compliment, she said, sweetly: "It is plain that you don't believe in me. Well, one has to live, you know and I love an easy life. I hope we may not meet again as enemies? But if we do—you will hve the time of your life in running me down."

"You must have some job in mind," Nick said, slowly.

"No-o, but there's no telling what the future may bring forth. Good-by and—take care of yourself for I shan't."

Nick seemed to have an instinctive feeling that some day he and this clever, unscrupulous actress would again be matching wits on opposite sides in a case of life-and-death; but for the time being her keenness caused him to forget Meg Alverson the adventuress.

THE END.

The next story (645) will be "Nick Carter's Satanic Enemy; or, The Case of an Evil Magic."

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WHAT THE PEARL BEDS HELD.

I was penniless!

I had been a month in Apia, which, as everyone knows, is in Samoa, having gone there full of determination to make a great name for myself.

You see, I'd always had a hankering after the South Seas; the color and romance of them appealed to me, for I was naturally fond of adventure, coming, as I did, of an adventurous stock. My grandfather had been eaten by cannibals in the Solomons; my father had gone out to Tahiti after pearls, and after he left that amazing island never turned up again, and so it might be said that the Pacific was the legitimate heritage of us Conglands. Well, whatever the reason, I'd taken out the bit of money my aunt had left me, and sent it out ahead of me to a Samoan bank, and had answered the call of the South.

When I reached Apia, after a voyage that was a long dream of delight, I found the bank had smashed, and, as I say, I was practically penniless!

Of course, I called myself several different sorts of a fool. I ought to have made careful inquiries, I ought to have taken my money with me; but I was practically alone in the world, and hadn't a soul to guide me beyond my dead aunt's lawyers, who were dry-as-dust old fogies, who couldn't understand what a lot of sightseen wanted by going abroad on his own hook. I'd always been accustomed to look out for myself, for I ran away to sea when I was fourteen, and that gives a fellow the gumption to handle himself in emergencies.

The worst of the sea is it doesn't teach a fellow much about business matters, so there I was in Apia without a cent, and without a friend worth the name, and, as far as I could see, without the ghost of a chance of making good. It was all right so long as my bit of spare cash lasted; I'd friends in plenty, but when the last dollar went the friends went, too.

Apia isn't a place where a man need exert himself unless he likes. There's something in the soft air and the lulling [illegible] that you can [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

eager, for this was almost the first I'd ever heard about my father's mysterious death.

"He left Tahiti, and there were some said the *Petrel* went down in the big hurricane the year after. Anyhow, no one ever saw the *Petrel* again, nor Morgan either, for that matter."

"Well? You are looking at me in a strange fashion, Climes."

"Aye, lad, I might well. There were some who said that your father didn't fall overboard in a natural fashion. There was a whisper got about that he'd been——" He stopped short.

"Go on!" I yelled, clutching at him hard. He shook his head sorrowfully. "They said he'd been murdered. They even said Morgan had had a hand in it; that your father'd taken him to the spot where the pearls were, and after he'd made sure of the locality of the spot, Morgan had knocked him on the head, and hove him overboard with a shot at his heels." I was on my feet by this, all my lassitude forgotten.

"And Morgan!" I cried. "What of him?"

"As I told you, lad, he disappeared in the big hurricane, him and his ship. That's all I know. If your father was murdered he was avenged. That's all there is to tell." It was enough, in very truth. My father, whom I had mourned as dead for so long, now turned out to have been murdered! Well, the evidence was purely circumstantial, perhaps; but I felt a strange conviction come over me, as I paced fretfully up and down, that I'd been sent out to the South Seas for some other reason than merely to make money in trading. There was a mystery attached to my father's death; if it were in my power I'd solve it. But I was helpless; I had not a cent in the world, not a friend, and of work there was none.

"That's a schooner making up for the harbor," said Climes dreamily, pointing out a white sail against the everlasting blue of the sea. "She looks pretty against the blue, don't she, Bert?"

* * * * * * *

It was old Leaho, the best-known diver in Apia, who brought Captain Knightley, of the *Seahawk*, to me where I lay beneath the palms next day, for my helplessness had left me stranded. I scrambled to my feet when Leaho called me by name, and turned to the white man with him. Climes had gone off to steep himself in drugged liquor for another week, as was his custom, and I was alone again.

"Dis fella Cappa Knightley," grinned Leaho. "dis chap you look for, cappie." Knightley eyed me covertly from under his wide sombrero, and I scanned his face with interest, for the man was not unknown to me by name. He had the reputation of being one of the most daring and unscupulous traders among the islands.

"You are seeking for me?" I asked. I looked again at the cunning face and the pointed beard, the evil, mocking eyes, and for some reason or other I took an unaccountable aversion to the man.

"Leaho here tells me you're the finest diver on the island," he said curtly; "you're the man I'm looking for. You can beat any of the natives, can't you?"

"I've heard it said," I replied. "I can go deeper and stop down longer than anyone hereabouts, at all events. What's the game, anyhow?"

"There's no game about it," he snapped. "I'm open to make you a long-job offer if you're willing. I want a good diver—a man who isn't afraid of a bit of work, and who can werry through out of a tight corner. If you like to take on the job I'll pay you fifty dollars a month—American dollars, me Mexicans—and your keep, for as long as you're in my employ. Like to take it on?"

I'd have gone for twenty dollars a month, aye, or less, for that matter.

"What's the game?" I asked again. "Is it pearls?"

"Yes, it's pearls—I hope. I've got wind of a bed that's never been touched, but when I sailed over it and sounded I found it too deep for ordinary divers; and since I can't afford to hire a proper diving outfit yet—well, I thought I'd ask about until I could find a man who mightn't mind trying to get down without the dress. Besides—you're a white man, and you won't care about this—the natives shy at the spot, say it's haunted, and a lot of tommyrot like that. But you won't turn up your nose at an offer like that if I can read the signs." I was shabby enough, heaven knows! He had read the signs.

"Yes, I'll take the job," I said. "When do you want me?" He said that to-morrow he intended to sail, and was about to turn away when he stopped abruptly.

"What's your name?" he asked. Now, it was on the tip of my tongue to tell him Conglands, but I hesitated. After all, it was no great honor to my name to be engaged as a diver—a native's job. And if it got about among decent people—well, there was no telling. "Carson," I said. You must remember that the natives knew me only as "Bert," and very few of the people round about Sailor-town in Apia knew my real name. Captain Knightley breathed hard for a minute, and I thought I read relief in his face.

"Be on board at six to-morrow," he said curtly. "I'm taking you on this man's recommendation, but Heaven help you if you've signed on under false pretenses!" And with that he was off, walking briskly.

There was rather a rough-looking crowd aboard the schooner when I joined. Half a dozen Kanakas, of course—no schooner sails without a crew of Kanakas; but there were two or three white men, too, and these all looked bad—bad to the core. Knightley seemed to be the pick of the lot, but that wasn't saying much.

Before I'd time to find out much about the ship, however, we weighed anchor, and left port, steering steadily north.

Well, we got along fairly well for the first week. There wasn't much to be done; the wind held fair, and we reeled off a good four or five knots every hour, until we began to get up into the low latitudes, when a sort of activity began to spread itself about the craft.

Knightley was the soul of good nature, and the feeding was of the best, and as the enervating influence of Apia hadn't quite worn off, I wasn't feeling disposed to exert myself unduly. There'd be time enough for that when we got over the pearling grounds.

But one night—it was a regular blazer, and the breeze had quite died down—I began to dream. I dreamed I saw myself climbing out of the stern ports of the schooner and scraping away at the paint of the counter. It was a silly dream, but when I wakened up again it was fresh upon me.

It was with this dream in my mind that, next day, as I leaned over the taffrail, smoking a pipe, I watched with intense interest one of the Kanakas, who was scraping away at the very spot where I'd dreamed I'd been scraping!

The ship's name was painted there, *Seahawk*, but the native went a bit deep with his scraper, and under the "S" of the name I made out the half-defaced remains of a "P." I don't know what was influencing me, but I whispered to the Kanaka to go on, and within half an hour he'd shown me as much as I could want to see. The ship's old name was plainly revealed, and she had been called the *Petrel!*

Simple enough. There were fifty schooners, if one, of that name in those waters, but I remembered in a flash that my father's last voyage had been in a schooner called the *Petrel*.

It was the day after this that we reached the spot where the pearl beds were supposed to lie. Knightley explained all there was to explain about them as we went along, and I laughed when he talked of the evil spirit haunting the spot. "I'm not afraid of ghosts," I said boastfully. A lot I knew!

"That's the brave lad," he said, patting me on the back in a fashion he had, and which I loathed. "Now, mind what I tell you, you get up some shell, and I'll pay you percentage on all you find, if it's worth anything."

I stripped myself, and oiled my body as the Kanakas do, while the schooner was being brought round, and by the time the boat was in the water I was ready for anything. Knightley himself accompanied me, and there were two Kanakas to row; and they told me afterward that all the time I was down below Knightley leaned over the stern of the boat, with his nose almost touching the water, waiting for something to happen, and glaring down through the depths as if he was afraid something was coming up out of the depths to clutch him body and soul, and drag him down to his death. The place had an eerie feel about it, even before I went overboard. But overboard I did go, and struck out like mad for the bottom, just to see what I could find. It was a pretty deep dive, but when I touched smooth sand I felt able to stand it quite a long time, and so I prowled about cautiously, though every time a fish whirled past me I started, and thought about that wretched ghost. But gradually I found myself touching shell, and without thinking much about the matter I tore off all I could reach in about five seconds, crammed them into the bag belted about my waist, and launched out for the surface. Knightley helped me aboard.

"Then the stories didn't lie!" he grunted. "Did you see anything besides shell there? By Jove! but these are fine specimens. Are you ready to go down again?"

As soon as I could I went overboard again, and spent all the rest of that day dragging shells adrift and carting them to the surface.

It was the unusual exertion that made me restless that night. I couldn't sleep, and I went on deck to get fresh air.

The Kanakas of the watch were asleep, and I let the night air fan me a little. Captain Knightley's cabin was on deck, and just as I was padding past his port in bare feet I heard him speak. I thought he was addressing me, and stopped, for he'd mentioned my name. Then I remembered that I'd shipped under a feigned name, and my blood began to run cold, for Knightley had said:

"It's no use, Conglands, you won't harm me now. You're out of the road, and the pearls are mine—all mine!

"Aha! it was a fine game to play, eh? to change the ship's name and my own, and let on that the *Petrel* had disappeared, and Morgan with her. It didn't need very much disguise, neither—just to grow a beard and mustache!

"Oh, yes, I'm winning, Conglands, I'm winning! I'll defy you to come up out of your grave and claim the pearls. They're mine, I tell you, mine! all mine!"

I say my blood ran cold—do you wonder?

Captain Knightley, the man who spoke, was no other than Morgan, he who had been suspected of murdering my father!

Not till then did I know why I'd taken such a rooted aversion to this man from the moment of our first meeting.

I walked the deck for an hour, wondering, thinking hard; but I could find no way out—no satisfactory solution.

Next day we were astir bright and early. I bit my lips till the blood came when Morgan appeared on deck. But I held my hand. Indeed, I went down to the boat as if nothing had happened. Morgan again went with me.

I took a mighty breath, joined my hands, and dived. After awhile I came to the beds, but in a different quarter—the schooner must have drifted during the night. I opened my eyes and looked about me. It was a dense sort of greenish twilight, but just ahead of me lay what appeared to be a very big shell. I touched it—it was smooth and round. Then I recoiled with a shudder of horror, for my fingers were touching a human skull!

I went up to the surface like a shot, to regain my calm, and answered Morgan's questions evasively. But as I hung to the boat's gunwale, I found myself thinking hard. This skeleton—on the very beds my father had known the secret of—promised a clew. Without saying a word about what I'd found I went down again—to find out all I could.

I made a close examination. The skull was fixed to a skeleton, the skeleton of a big man—of a man who must have stood nearly seven feet high. My father had been that height about. To one leg bone was tied a rotting sack, and the sack was full of stones. But that wasn't all. The back of the skull was crushed in as if from a heavy blow!

"What's wrong, Carson?" asked Knightley as I rose to the surface.

"I'm not feeling very good," I answered. "I'll get back aboard and rest to-day." I had to account for my white face somehow, and besides, I wanted responsible witnesses near me for what I was about to say.

Once I was dressed and had recovered something of my calm, I went out on deck. Knightley and the white men were leaning over the rail, peering into the depths. I touched the skipper on his shoulder.

"I'd like a word with you, captain," I began, and he turned at the meaning in my voice.

"What do you want?" he snarled.

"I'd like a word with you, Captain—Morgan," I said coldly. He turned white to the lips, and drew his breath with a gasp.

"What do you mean?" he cried threateningly. "My name's Knightley."

"Captain—Morgan," I repeated, "I want to know why the skeleton of a man seven feet high—the height of my father, Frank Conglands—is lying there on the beds, with the skull smashed in and a bag of holystones tied to the leg."

I heard one or two of the white men who had heard me from where they stood behind give a strange, gasping sound. Then they drew farther away from the skipper, as if his nearness contaminated them.

"What are you talking about?" blustered Morgan. "I know nothing about Frank Conglands—my soul! I see now, I see now." He crouched into himself, and I thought he was about to collapse. I turned to the other white men and said:

"I've just found the skeleton of a man who might be my father. Whoever it was has been murdered. That man's name is Morgan—he sailed with my father on his last voyage. Look at him—he condemns himself." But before I could rightly finish there was a shuffling sound of feet, I heard a cry from one of the men, and turned just in the nick of time. Morgan was coming for me like a mad bull, with a deadly menace in his eyes and a glittering sheath-knife in his hand. A moment later and I should have been too late. As it was I stepped forward a pace, and launched out with my fist. His knife point ripped along my arm, but I'd made no mistake that time. Before anyone could stir hand or foot he'd reeled back on the narrow deck. And just abreast of where he'd started in to murder me as he'd murdered my father, the rail had been unshipped to get out the boat the day before. He staggered once, missed his footing, and plunged overboard with an awful yell. Then the waters closed about him, and bubbles rose.

"Now," I said to the rest of the crew, "if you like you can knife me, and send me to join my father. As soon as that man comes up I'm going to take him aboard, and take this schooner back to Apia and have him hung. I've got evidence enough to prove my case. You've seen what you've seen——"

"We never thought he was Morgan," swore one man with an oath. "If we'd thought that we'd have seen him rotting before we'd taken a hand. You've played the game, younker, and when he comes up we'll tie him fast."

But Morgan never did come up.

Whether my blow had stunned him, or whether his vile heart had failed him, I can't tell; but after waiting a couple of minutes and not seeing him rise, I dived overboard after him, and found him. He was quite dead.

Yes, afterward, I got as many pearls as ever I'll need, but before I touched another oyster I brought my father's skeleton to the surface and had it decently buried.

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